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THE BRONTË FAMILY

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO

PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË

VOL. II.

THE BRONTË FAMILY

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO

PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË

BY

FRANCIS A. LEYLAND.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE BRONTË FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

CHARLOTTE AND EMILY IN BRUSSELS.

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It was more than a month before Charlotte received the reply from her Aunt Branwell. Meanwhile she had waited patiently, pending the anxious discussions at the parsonage, and she breathed not a single word of the great project to her friend. It was her way to work in obscurity, and to let her efforts 'be known by

their results.' But at last, as I have said, consent was given to her plan; the necessary money was forthcoming; and it only remained for her to make the arrangements for her journey, and Emily had arrangements to make also. There was much of letter-writing to do, letters to Brussels—whither Charlotte would of all cities prefer to go,—and to many other places; and there were clothes to make, and farewells to be said.

It was a great disappointment to Charlotte,—when, having left her situation at Christmas, 1841, she came to Haworth to join the family circle,—that Branwell could not be there, and it troubled him very much too. But the plans were talked over, the letters were written, and Charlotte did not repent her boldness,—nay, she looked forward confidently to the venture. It seems a strange ambitious plan to us, and one showing little knowledge of the world, this of spending six months in Brussels, in that short time to become thoroughly acquainted with French, to be improved in Italian, and get a dash of German; and, so provided with accomplishments, to set up a successful school at Burlington,

—for the Dewsbury Moor project had already been relinquished.

Brussels was fixed upon by Charlotte for several reasons: because it was a cheap journey, because education could be had there at any rate as good as at any other place in Europe, and perhaps better; and then, Mary and Martha T——, her friends, were staying at Brussels at the Château de Kokleberg, and Mary, with Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the English chaplain, would find the desired *pensionnat.* But there was a temporary disappointment: it was reported that the schools in Brussels were not good; and Charlotte immediately set to work to discover another establishment, which was found at Lille—one that Baptist Noel recommended, where the terms were £50 for each pupil. It had been at last arranged that Charlotte and Emily should journey to this place, about the middle of February, 1842, under the escort of Madame Marzials, a lady then in London, when again the plans were changed. Mrs. Jenkins, the chaplain's wife, had discovered, to Charlotte's great delight, the establishment of Madame Héger in the Rue d'Isabelle, at Brussels, which

was greatly eulogized, and thither it was finally decided that the two sisters could go.

Charlotte went to Brussels with a stout heart and in perfect confidence, and she left no regrets behind her; but it was not so with Emily. The elder sister was cast in a different mould from the younger; there was a spice of adventure in her composition, and the pleasure, too, of seeing new places was keen. It had been said to her by some inward voice, as to Lucy Snowe, who is the truest portrait of Charlotte, 'Leave this wilderness, and go out hence;' and she answered the query, 'Where?' with a sharp determination; and went out to enter into the spirit of the things she met, wherever her mental constitution would enable her to do so. 'For background,' she says of her journey in 'Villette,' 'spread a sky, solemn and dark blue, and—grand with imperial promise, with tints of enchantment—strode from north to south a God-bent bow, an arch of hope:' but that was to be struck out. 'Cancel that, reader—or rather let it stand, and draw thence a moral—an alliterative, text-hand copy:

'"Day-dreams are delusions of the demon."'

So was Charlotte to be disillusioned. But what a fairyland had she fashioned to herself of that gay Belgian capital, and what painful memories she brought thence! For, according to Mr. Wemyss Reid,—and doubtless he is right—her stay in Brussels with Emily, and afterwards alone, was the turning-point in Charlotte's career, and the record of it in 'Villette' was wrung from her as her heart's blood, amid paroxysms of positive anguish. But of these things she knew nothing in the January of 1842; then the future slept in sunny calm, so sunny, indeed, that to part from Haworth, and those she knew there, her father and her brother and sister, gave her scarcely a pang; and afterwards, so far as one can trace, from her letters, and from 'Villette,' which expresses even more, the troubles of the parsonage were never acute troubles to her. Her joys and troubles abroad were in fact her own, and they were borne and suffered alone.

But, with Emily, Haworth was no wilderness, a paradise rather, and with bitter pain she left the moors that the coming summer should cover with purple billows. For Emily Brontë was

inspired far more than her sister with the influences of locality and of her home. Amidst the distant Yorkshire hills dwelt, too, her father, with Branwell and Anne, whom she loved more than all else in the world; and many an hour, sitting in the bare rooms of the *pensionnat,* she pondered on their hopes and their sorrows. We cannot say that Emily's sojourn in Brussels changed her in any way whatever, nor that she was made by it of any nearer kinship with the outside world.

Mr. Brontë accompanied his daughters, and Mary and her brother, who travelled with them to Brussels. They stayed a day or two in London, at the Chapter coffee-house in Paternoster Row, and a good deal of sight-seeing was done before they left for the Belgian capital. In 'Villette' Charlotte has told us of her first visit to London, and of the travelling to Labassecour, but the actual details refer more probably to her second journey thither. Yet we may feel sure that it was with the same spirit that she saw the metropolis, that she revelled in its busy life and in the earnestness that moved it. We may imagine her on the dome of St. Paul's

looking over the river with its bridges, and, alongside it, the Temple Gardens, and Westminster beyond; and we may see her in the classic ground of Paternoster Row. Emily has left no record of her feelings on this journey, but we may be sure they differed very much from Charlotte's. We have an account in 'The Professor' of William Crimsworth's feelings when he entered Belgium, and they were doubtless Charlotte's also. 'This is Belgium, reader. Look! don't call the picture flat or a dull one—it was neither flat nor dull to me when I first beheld it. When I left Ostend on a fine February morning, and found myself on the road to Brussels, nothing could look vapid to me. My sense of enjoyment possessed an edge whetted to the finest; untouched, keen, exquisite . . . . Liberty I clasped in my arms for the first time, and the influence of her smile and embrace revived my life like the sun and the west wind.'

It was proposed at the time that the two sisters should remain in the *pensionnat* until the *grandes vacances* in September, when they were to return home. They were in Brussels then to

work, and the boisterous schoolgirls found no companions in them, for they remained together for a long time, and read and studied apart. These two sisters did not easily make friends; they were shy, and their companions thought them peculiar—Charlotte, clad in her plain, home-made dress, and Emily, with her gigot sleeves and long, straight skirts, walking in the garden together. Mrs. Jenkins told Mrs. Gaskell that she asked them to spend Sundays and holidays with her, but at last she found that even these visits gave them more pain than pleasure, and thenceforth they remained away. This reserve never passed from Emily entirely, but Charlotte afterwards gained confidence and made friends.

There were memories, as Mrs. Gaskell records, connected with Madame Héger's house in the Rue d'Isabelle, of mediæval chivalry and romance, which are doubtless reflected in the visits of the nun to the *grenier* and the old garden where Lucy Snowe is. From the gay, bright Rue Royale four flights of steps lead down to the Rue d'Isabelle, and the chimneys of its houses are level with one's feet as one stands

at the top of them. The quiet street was called the Fossé aux Chiens in the thirteenth century, because the ducal kennels were there, on the site of Madame Héger's house; but these gave place later to a hospital for the homeless and the poor. Afterwards the Arbalétriers du Grand Serment had their place there, and noble company visited them, and great ceremonials and feasts they gave. Later again the street was called the Rue d'Isabelle, because the Infanta Isabella induced the Arbalétriers to allow a road to be made through their grounds, and built them in return a noble mansion close by, which was afterwards Madame Héger's.

William Crimsworth saw the establishment. 'I remember, before entering the park, I stood awhile to contemplate the statue of General Belliard, and then I advanced to the top of the great staircase just beyond, and I looked down into a narrow back street, which I afterwards learnt was called the Rue d'Isabelle. I well recollect that my eye rested on the green door of a rather large house opposite, where, on a brass plate, was inscribed, "Pensionnat de Demoiselles."'

Madame Héger, the mistress of this *pensionnat*, was a woman of capacity, and understood the duties of her position, but apparently Charlotte did not get on very well with her, and in the second year of the residence in Brussels they were estranged. It was said that the *directrice* had 'quelque chose de froid et de compassé dans son maintien,' which did not prepossess people in her favour; and Charlotte, it appears, had little tolerance of her beliefs or her prejudices. Monsieur Héger, unlike his wife, was of a quick and energetic nature, choleric and irritable in temperament, but withal gentle and benevolent also. It was said that there were few characters so noble and admirable as his, that he was a zealous member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and that, after days occupied in arduous educational work, he was wont to gather the poor together in order that he might amuse and instruct them at the same time. He gave up his lucrative position, too, as prefect of the studies at the Athenée because he could not succeed in introducing religious instruction into the curriculum there. Very many traits of Monsieur

Héger's character are reproduced in that of Paul Emanuel.

The school was a large and prosperous one, conducted as continental schools usually are, and Charlotte, in a short time, was happy in the busy life she led there. She has left an admirable picture, a veritable photograph, of the establishment in the pages of 'Villette,' which indeed contains her mental history during her sojourn there. The training through which she and Emily were put was different from that of the other pupils. Monsieur Héger was quick to perceive that they were capable of greater things than most people, so he took the bold step of putting them to the higher walks of French literature, omitting the general work of grammar and vocabulary; and his experiment was justified by its success.

Charlotte and Emily, with one other girl and the *governante* of Madame Héger's children, were the only exceptions to the Catholicism of the house, and the Brontës found that this difference cut them off in sympathy from the rest of the inhabitants. 'We are completely isolated

in the midst of numbers,' says Charlotte; but she adds, 'I think I am never unhappy; my present life is so delightful, so congenial to my own nature, compared with that of a governess. My time, constantly occupied, passes too rapidly.' We do not find that news from home gave her trouble, nor that she was particularly uneasy in her absence. 'I don't deny,' she says later, 'that I have brief attacks of home-sickness; but, on the whole, I have borne a very valiant heart so far; and I have been happy in Brussels, because I have always been fully occupied with the employments that I like.'

Charlotte's happiness at this time was in herself. She lived in bright anticipation of the time when it should be possible to the sisters to open a school, which was to be the reward of their arduous studies, and of that love for work and that perseverance of which Monsieur Héger spoke in his letter to Mr. Brontë, written when Charlotte and Emily were called to Haworth. Lucy Snowe in 'Villette' tells of such hopes; of the tenement which she shall take, with its one large room and two or three smaller ones; of the few benches and desks, the black tableau, and

the *estrade*, with its chair, tables, chalks, and sponge, where she shall teach the day-scholars. 'Madame Beck's commencement was—as I have often heard her say—from no higher starting-point, and where is she now?' This was the hope which Lucy Snowe repeated to Monsieur Paul, and it pleased him, though he called it 'an Alnaschar dream.' But it was the salt of Charlotte's life during the first months of her residence in Brussels.

Brussels was liked by Charlotte, and she calls it a beautiful city; and she liked the country about it, though it differed so much from her own hilly Haworth. But she did not like its inhabitants; the Belgians were to her people of a lower order; she could not enter into their pleasures, and she did not understand them. Charlotte, with her restricted views of life, came into the midst of strangers; she found them different from her ideal, and she was repulsed by them. The two books in which she has recorded her impressions of the Belgians are occupied with a frequent contrast of 'the daughter of Albion and nursling of Protestantism' with 'the foster-child of Rome, the pro-

tegée of Jesuitry,' always to the disadvantage of the latter. Mesdemoiselles Eulalie, Hortense, and Caroline in 'The Professor,' and Mesdemoiselles Blanche, Virginie, and Angélique in 'Villette,' are Charlotte's types of the Belgian female—heavy, stolid, unimpressionable to good, sensual, gross, and unintellectual. The Labassecouriennes were 'a swinish multitude,' not to be driven by force; 'whenever a lie was necessary for their occasions, they brought it out with a careless ease and breadth, altogether untroubled by any rebuke of conscience;' and they were cold, animal, and selfish. Nevertheless, occupied in her duties, Charlotte was happy, even with these companions. We have no actual means of knowing what Emily thought of them, for her life amongst them was never reproduced in her writings, and it made but little permanent impression upon her. Charlotte said that her sister worked 'like a horse,' and that she did not get on well with Monsieur Héger.

The two sisters had now friends in Brussels, for they sometimes saw Mary and Martha T——

who were staying there at the Château de Kokleberg, and these young ladies had cousins in the city, whose house was often a pleasant meeting-place. But Emily made little progress with these friendships.

The *grandes vacances* began in September, but Charlotte and Emily did not return home then as had been intended; all was well at Haworth, and there was no reason why they should. Madame Héger made a proposal that they should remain six months more, Charlotte as English teacher, and Emily to instruct some pupils in music; and they were to continue their studies and have board without payment, but they were offered no salary. These terms were at last accepted, and the sisters remained through the long *vacances* with a few boarders who were also there, and Charlotte, at least, was happy.

But a year later, when the rooms of the *pensionnat* were once more deserted, and Emily far away in the parsonage at Haworth, there can be no doubt that she became again subject to that melancholia which had previously been

remarked in her when she was at Miss Wooler's. The excitement of her first sojourn at Brussels wore off, she found no novelty in the things she saw, and she was left to solitary reflection a great deal. But her melancholy began with herself. 'My youth is leaving me,' she said to Mary; 'I can never do better than I have done, and I have done nothing yet,' and she seemed at such times, according to this friend, 'to think that most human beings were destined by the pressure of worldly interests to lose one faculty and feeling after another, till they went dead altogether. I hope I shall be put in my grave as soon as I'm dead; I don't want to walk about so,' she added. Mary advised her to go home or elsewhere, when she was in this state, for the sake of change, and Charlotte thanked her for the advice, but did not take it.

'That vacation! Shall I ever forget it? I think not,' says Lucy Snowe . . . . 'My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its cords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! How gloomy

the forsaken garden,—grey now with the dust of a town summer departed!' To Lucy Snowe the future gave no promise of comfort; and a sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed upon her,—a 'despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly.' She found the future but a hopeless desert: 'tawny sands, with no green fields, no palm-tree, no well in view.' And these were the thoughts, too, that oppressed Charlotte Brontë in Brussels and sorely weighed her down. It was in one of these fits of depression, overcome with melancholy, that she found consolation in the confessional, when she poured her tale of solitary sorrow into the ear of a priest—a Père Silas, like him in 'Villette,' who spoke of peace and hope to Lucy Snowe.

Troubles of another kind had, however, broken in sadly enough on the close of Charlotte's first *vacances* in Brussels in 1842, when she and Emily were greatly shocked by the death of Martha T—— at the Château de Kokleberg, after a very short illness. This was a great grief to the little circle in Brussels, for the dead girl had been a bright and affectionate companion,—

bewailed under the name of Jessie in 'Shirley,' —and she was deeply lamented. But another grief awaited the Brontë sisters; they heard that their aunt Branwell was ill,—was dead; they were wanted at home; and at once, after very hasty preparation, they left Brussels, Emily not to return. They came back to the parsonage at Haworth, to find the funeral over, and the house deprived of one who had been its support and guardian for years.

Thus their stay in Brussels was suddenly cut short, and their studies were interrupted; but they had learned a good deal during their stay there. Monsieur Héger wrote to console Mr. Brontë on his loss; and said that in another year the two girls would have been secured against the eventualities of the future. They were being instructed, and, at the same time, were acquiring the art of instruction: Emily was learning the piano, and receiving lessons from the best Belgian professors; and she had little pupils herself. 'Elle perdait donc à la fois un reste d'ignorance et un reste plus gênant encore de timidité.' Charlotte was beginning to give French lessons,

and to gain 'cette assurance, cet aplomb si nécessaire dans l'enseignement.' It was this kind letter from Monsieur Héger that afterwards induced Mr. Brontë to allow Charlotte to return to Brussels. -

CHAPTER II.

OTHER POEMS.

Branwell at the Parsonage: his Loneliness—'The Epicurean's Song'—'Song'—Northangerland—'Noah's Warning over Methusaleh's Grave'—Letter to Mr. Grundy—Miss Branwell's Death—Her Will—Her Nephew Remembered—Injustice done to Him in this Matter by the Biographers of his Sisters.

DURING the absence of his sisters Charlotte and Emily in Brussels, and while Anne was away as a governess, Branwell no doubt felt lonely at the parsonage at Haworth; but he appears to have sought consolation from his troubles in the soothing influences of music and poetry. He knew that these employments softened many of the difficulties that beset the road of human life, and that they introduced men into a purer and nobler sphere than that which is called reality.

He felt that they led 'the spirit on, in an ecstasy of admiration, of sweet sorrow, or of unearthly joy, to the music of harmonious, and not wholly intelligible words, raising in the mind beauteous and transcendent images.' Whatever may have been said as to Branwell's proneness to self-indulgence, and his enjoyment of society, even that of 'The Bull,' and of the corrupt of Haworth, none of his alleged depravity and coarseness of disposition disfigured his verses, however deficient his early effusions may have been in the higher excellencies of the Muse. From the general tenor of his writings, which is religious and sometimes philosophical, he seems, under his misfortunes, which were ever with him in one shape or another, to have sought consolation in the shadowed paths of poetry and reflection.

Some lights now and then diversify the general gloom of his stanzas; but, even then, an air of sadness still pervades them. More I shall find to say on the special features of Branwell's poems in the later pages of the present work.

He wrote the following verses in 1842:

THE EPICUREAN'S SONG.

'The visits of Sorrow
Say, why should we mourn?
Since the sun of to-morrow
May shine on its urn;
And all that we think such pain
Will have departed,—then
Bear for a moment what cannot return;

'For past time has taken
Each hour that it gave,
And they never awaken
From yesterday's grave;
So surely we may defy
Shadows, like memory,
Feeble and fleeting as midsummer wave.

'From the depths where they're falling
Nor pleasure, nor pain,
Despite our recalling,
Can reach us again;
Though we brood over them,
Nought can recover them,
Where they are laid, they must ever remain.

'So seize we the present,
And gather its flowers,
For,—mournful or pleasant,—
'Tis all that is ours;
While daylight we're wasting,
The evening is hasting,
And night follows fast on vanishing hours.

'Yes,—and we, when night comes,
Whatever betide,
Must die as our fate dooms,
And sleep by their side;
For *change* is the only thing
Always continuing;
And it sweeps creation away with its tide.'

Here Branwell, writing, contrary to his custom, in a gay mood, forgets the failures of the past, diverting his mind from them by seeking serenity in the diversions which now and then lighten his path. He is perfectly conscious of the fleeting nature of earthly things; and, with that natural and felicitous faculty of versification with which his images and figures are invariably described, he invests the Epicurean with the hopes of the Optimist, or with the indifference of the Stoic to the shadows which ever and anon dim the pleasures of human existence. There is nothing assuredly in this lyric of the 'pulpit twang,' to which Miss Robinson refers, nor is it a 'weak and characterless effusion.'

To the year 1842 belongs the following song which in feeling reminds one of Burns' 'Auld Lang Syne.' The subject, however, is distinct,

and is pervaded by a profound sentiment of enduring affection, and is expressive of the deepest feeling in reference to it.

SONG.

'Should life's first feelings be forgot,
As Time leaves years behind?
Should man's for ever changing lot
Work changes in the mind?

'Should space, that severs heart from heart,
The heart's best thoughts destroy?
Should years, that bid our youth depart,
Bid youthful memories die?

'Oh! say not that these coming years
Will warmer friendships bring;
For friendship's joys, and hopes, and fears,
From deeper fountains spring.

'Its feelings to the *heart* belong;
Its sign—the glistening eye,
While new affections on the *tongue*,
Arise and live and die.

'So, passing crowds may *smiles* awake
The passing hour to cheer;
But only old acquaintance' sake
Can ever form a tear.'

Leyland was himself a poet, as I have said, and a literary critic of ability and judgment.

Branwell submitted some poems to him for opinion, and he advised his friend to publish them with his name appended, rather than under the pseudonym of 'Northangerland,' for he considered them creditable to his genius. But Branwell, on July 12th, 1842, writing to Leyland, asking some technical questions, says, in a postscript, 'Northangerland has so long wrought on in secret and silence that he dare not take your kind encouragement in the light which *vanity* would prompt him to do.'

On August 10th, 1842, he wrote to Leyland in reference to a monument, which that sculptor had recently put up at Haworth, and he concluded by saying:

'When you see Mr. Constable—to whom I shall write directly,—be kind enough to tell him that—owing to my absence from home when it arrived, and to the carelessness of those who neglected to give it me on my return,—I have only *now* received his note. Its injunctions shall be gladly attended to; but he would better please me by refraining from any slurs on the fair fame of Charles Freeman or Benjamin Caunt, Esquires.'

Branwell did not lose his early interest in the 'noble science,' but continued it with a half-serious constancy. Constable and Leyland regarded the pugilistic encounters of the 'Ring' as brutal and degrading, but Branwell always professed to defend its champions with energy and zeal; and in this letter he playfully alludes to two of them. Among his literary labours of the year 1842 is the following poem. It is entitled:

NOAH'S WARNING OVER METHUSALEH'S GRAVE.

'Brothers and men! one moment stay
Beside your latest patriarch's grave,
While God's just vengeance yet delay,
While God's blest mercy yet can save.

'Will you compel my tongue to say,
That underneath this nameless sod
Your hands, with mine, have laid to-day
The *last* on earth who walked with God?

'Shall the pale corpse, whose hoary hairs
Are just surrendered to decay,
Dissolve the chain which bound our years
To hundred ages passed away?

'Shall six-score years of warnings dread
Die like a whisper on the wind?

Shall the dark doom above your head,
Its blinded victims darker find?

'Shall storms from heaven *without* the world,
Find wilder storms from hell *within*?
Shall long-stored, late-come wrath be hurled;
Or,—will you, can you turn from sin?

'Have patience, if too plain I speak,
For time, my sons, is hastening by;
Forgive me if my accents break:
Shall *I* be saved and *Nature* die?

'Forgive that pause:—one look to Heaven
Too plainly tells me, he is gone,
Who long with me in vain had striven
For earth and for its peace alone.

'He's gone!—my Father—full of days,—
From life which left no joy for him;
Born in creation's earliest blaze;
Dying—himself, its latest beam.

'But he is gone! and, oh, behold,
Shown in his death, God's latest sign!
Than which more plainly never told
An Angel's presence His design.

'By it, the evening beams withdrawn
Before a starless night descend;
By it, the last blest spirit born
From this beginning of an end;

'By all the strife of civil war
That beams within yon fated town;

By all the heart's worst passions there,
That call so loud for vengeance down;

'By that vast wall of cloudy gloom,
Piled boding round the firmament;
By all its presages of doom,
Children of men—Repent! Repent!'

This poem has also the impress of sadness, but the onward sweep and dignity of its verse are not ruffled by the turbulent undercurrents of Branwell's mood. The idea of the piece is well borne out in majestic and suitable language, though some instances of that incoherence and indefiniteness which, at intervals, distinguish the earlier poems of his sisters, may be noticed in it.

In the latter part of the year 1842 the state of Miss Branwell's health became a cause of anxiety to the Brontë family. Acquainted as they had been, in years gone by, with sickness and death, they sorrowed, in anticipation of the inevitable loss of the lady, who had been for long years as a mother to them. Under the shadow which spread over their home, Branwell wrote to his friend—Mr. Grundy—referring to it, saying that he was attending the death-bed of his aunt who had been for twenty years as his mother.

In another letter to Mr. Grundy, of the 29th of October, Branwell thus alludes in affectionate terms to her death:

'I am incoherent, I fear, but I have been waking two nights witnessing such agonizing suffering as I would not wish my worst enemy to endure; and I have now lost the pride and director of all the happy days connected with my childhood. I have suffered such sorrow since I last saw you at Haworth, that I should not now care if I were fighting in India or ——, since, when the mind is depressed, danger is the most effectual cure. But you don't like croaking, I know well, only I request you to understand from my two notes that I have not forgotten *you*, but *myself*.' [1]

Charlotte and Emily hurried home from Brussels on the death of their aunt, as is stated in the last chapter, to find her already interred.

Mrs. Gaskell, alluding to the death of Miss Branwell, has given the following version of that lady's will. She says:

'The small property which she (Miss Branwell) had accumulated, by dint of personal frugality

[1] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 83.

and self-denial, was bequeathed to her nieces. Branwell, her darling, was to have had his share; but his reckless expenditure had distressed the good old lady, and his name was omitted in her will.'[1]

Miss Robinson, implicitly, and without reflection, following this author, says:

'Miss Branwell's will had to be made known. The little property that she had saved out of her frugal income was all left to her three nieces. Branwell had been her darling, the only son, called by her name; but his disgrace had wounded her too deeply. He was not even mentioned in her will.'[2]

Miss Elizabeth Branwell had made her will in the year 1833 (when her nephew was about fifteen years of age), by which she left the following items to the children of Mr. Brontë:—

To Charlotte, an Indian Workbox.
To Emily Jane, a Workbox with China top, and an Ivory Fan.

[1] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xi.
[2] 'Emily Brontë,' p. 102.

To Branwell, a Japanese Dressing-case.
To Anne, her Watch, Eye Glass, and Chain.

Amongst these three nieces, her rings, silver spoons, books, clothes, &c., were to be divided as their father should think proper. Her money, arising from various sources, she left in trust for the benefit of her nieces, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, and Elizabeth Jane, the daughter of her sister, Jane Kingston, to be equally divided among them, when the youngest should have attained the age of twenty-one years. But, if these died, all was to go to her niece, Anne Kingston, and if she died, the accumulated money was to be divided between the children of her 'dear brother and sisters.' Had Branwell, who was one of these 'children,' survived his own sisters, and the cousin referred to in the will, he would have been one, if not the sole, recipient of the accumulated money in question. This contingency was present to Miss Branwell's mind when she made the bequest, and it was never either altered or revoked.

It is amazing that so much ignorance should

have been displayed on a subject so easily capable of being correctly stated; but it is lamentable that this ignorance should have led the biographers of the Brontës, by erroneous statements, to inflict additional and unmerited injury on Branwell.

CHAPTER III.

A MISPLACED ATTACHMENT.

Christmas, 1842—Branwell is Cheerful—Charlotte goes to Brussels for another Year—Branwell receives Appointment as Tutor—Branwell visits Halifax, and meets Mr. Grundy there—Charlotte's Mental Depression in Brussels—Mrs. Gaskell attributes it to Branwell's Conduct—Proofs that it was Not so—Charlotte's 'Disappointment' at Brussels—She returns to Haworth—Branwell's Misplaced Attachment—He is sent away to New Scenes.

THE death of Miss Branwell had brought Charlotte and Emily home from Brussels; and Anne, from her situation, was present on the sad occasion. When the Christmas holidays came round, the sisters were all at home again. Branwell was with them; which was always a pleasure at that time, and Charlotte's friend, 'E,' came to see her. Having overcome the first pang of grief on the death of their aunt, they enjoyed

their Christmas very much together. Branwell was cheerful and even merry; and in Charlotte's next letter, written in a happy mood to her friend, who had just left them, he sent a playful message. 'Branwell wants to know,' says Charlotte, 'why you carefully excluded all mention of him, when you particularly send your regards to every other member of the family. He desires to know in what he has offended you? Or whether it is considered improper for a young lady to mention the gentlemen of a house?'[1] While they were together, plans for the future were talked over with eagerness and hope. Charlotte had accepted the proposal of Monsieur Héger that she should return to Brussels for another year, when she would have completed her knowledge of French and be fully qualified to commence a school on a footing which was yet impossible. Emily was to remain at home now to attend to her father's house, and Anne was to return to her situation as governess.

Branwell also found occupation as tutor in the same family where Anne had been for some time

[1] 'Unpublished Letters of Charlotte Brontë,' *Hours at Home*, chap. xi., p. 204.

employed. He commenced his duties, in his new position, after the Christmas holidays of the year 1842. On his arrival at the house of his employer, he was introduced to the members of the family; and it is not too much to say that his new friends were more than satisfied with his graceful manners, his wit, and the extent of his information. Here Branwell felt himself happy; for, contrary to his expectation, he had found, to his mind, a pleasant pasture, with comparative ease, where he had only looked for the usual drudgery of a tutor's work. His family were contented that he was thus respectably and hopefully employed. The gentleman, who had engaged Branwell as tutor to his son, was a man of some literary attainments; he was fond of rural sports, and had an urbane disposition, and quick perceptions. His wife was a lady of lofty bearing, of graceful manners, and kindly condescension; and, although approaching middle age at the time, was possessed of great personal attractions.

If the Brontës were glad at Branwell's appointment, the family he had entered were equally gratified that they had obtained a teacher whose

talents they considered to be equalled only by his virtues. The time of his master, who was a clergyman, was often taken up with the duties and engagements of his position, and his lady was generally occupied with the cares of home and the enjoyments of fashionable country life. Branwell was not, therefore, too much harassed in the discharge of his duties; and he found, in the family in which he was placed, none of the rigid formality which might have rendered his position irksome. His occupation was varied by many rambles in the neighbourhood with his pupil; and, in the evening, after the duties of the day were discharged, when he retired to the farmstead where he lived, his time was entirely at his own disposal.

Unlike Anne, Branwell was not troubled with an excess of diffidence. Being naturally of an amiable and sociable disposition, he soon formed acquaintances in the neighbourhood of his sojourn, and among them was Dr. ——, physician to the family in which he was a tutor. Besides being possessed of a fund of anecdote, combined with an entertaining manner of relating stories, that alone made him excellent company, Bran-

well was found to be a thorough musician, for he had further cultivated this taste and acquired considerable skill in performance.

Six months soon passed away, and Branwell and Anne once more made the parsonage at Haworth happy with their presence. One of Branwell's first impulses, after his welcome at home, was to visit his friends at Halifax; where, on this occasion, he had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Grundy. On the return of himself and his sister to their duties, there is no doubt that he continued the exertions he had made to conduct himself with such prudent diligence and self-possession as to ingratiate himself into the good favour of the family with whom he resided.

Charlotte was in the Rue d'Isabelle as English teacher; where, having gained a familiarity with the French language, though growing home-sick and not well, she resolved to remain till the end of the year; and, if possible, to acquire a knowledge of German.

It was at the beginning of August, as the *vacances* approached, that Charlotte became dispirited. The prospect of five weeks of loneliness in a deserted house, in a foreign city, was

more than she could bear: the last English friend was leaving Brussels: she would have no one to whom she could turn her thoughts. 'I forewarn you, I am in low spirits,' she writes,—'that earth and heaven are dreary and empty to me at this moment.' For the first time in her life she really dreaded the vacation; 'Alas,' she says, 'I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight at my heart; and I do so wish to go home. Is not this childish?' Yet she was bravely resolved, despite her weakness, to bear up, to stay; but for Charlotte Brontë, as for Lucy Snowe, those September days were days of suffering. Once, a little later, her resolution failed her. She was alone, on some holiday; the other inmates had gone to visit their friends in the city; Charlotte had none there now. She was solitary, and felt herself neglected by Madame Héger; she could bear it no longer, so she went to madame herself and told her she could not stay; but Monsieur Héger, hearing of it, with characteristic vehemence, pronounced his decision that she should not leave, and she remained.

Mrs. Gaskell describes her suffering from

depression of mind, arising from ill-health, in her second year at Brussels, in gloomy terms, and this seems, indeed, to be the main point she is aiming to illustrate. She says: 'There were causes for distress and anxiety in the news from home, particularly as regarded Branwell. In the dead of the night, lying awake at the end of the long deserted dormitory, in the vast and silent house, every fear respecting those whom she loved, and who were so far off in another country, became a terrible reality, oppressing her and choking up the very life-blood in her heart. Those nights were times of sick, dreary, wakeful misery, precursors of many such in after years.'[1] Mr. T. Wemyss Reid, in his monograph on Charlotte, has very properly taken exception to the manner in which Mrs. Gaskell has laid stress upon and exaggerated the occasional depression from which Charlotte suffered; and, certainly, there is nothing to show, in any of her letters from Brussels, that there was cause for anxiety on Branwell's account. On the contrary, there is very good evidence that nothing of the kind interfered with his sister's

[1] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xii.

peace. Charlotte left Brussels at the end of the year 1843, and arrived at Haworth on the 2nd of January, 1844. Branwell and Anne were also at home for the Christmas holidays, and Charlotte wrote to her friend 'E' in these words: 'Anne and Branwell have just left us to return to ——; they are both wonderfully valued in their situations.'[1]

It was known, then, that Branwell had given satisfaction to his employers, and the happiness at this reunion of the family would have been complete had it not been for one circumstance. Charlotte's friends were now expecting that she would commence a school. She desired it, she says, above all things. She had sufficient money for the undertaking, and hoped she had some qualifications for success. Yet she could not then enter upon it. 'You will ask me, why?' she writes. 'It is on papa's account; he is now, as you know, getting old, and it grieves me to tell you that he is losing his sight. I have felt for some months that I ought not to be away from him; and I feel now it would be

[1] 'Unpublished Letters of Charlotte Brontë,' *Hours at Home*, xi.

too selfish to leave him (at least so long as Branwell and Anne are absent) in order to pursue selfish interests of my own.' She appears, from an observation in one of her letters, written some time after the date at which we have arrived, to have regretted having gone to Brussels a second time. She says, 'I returned to Brussels after aunt's death against my conscience, prompted by what then seemed an irresistible impulse. I was punished for my selfish folly by a total withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind.'[1] While Charlotte was still at Brussels she heard that some of her friends thought that the '*époux* of Mademoiselle Brontë' must be on the Continent, since she had declined a situation of £50 a year in England, and accepted one at £16, and returned to Belgium. This she appears, in a letter to one of them, to deny; though, whether with the intention of piquing her friend, or avoiding the question, is not distinct. Mr. Reid believes that, in this second sojourn at Brussels, Charlotte Brontë passed through an experience of the heart which proved the turn-

[1] 'Charlotte Brontë,' by T. Wemyss Reid, chap. vi.

ing-point of her life, and made her what she was; and that it was not the subsequent misfortunes of her brother, as Mrs. Gaskell asks us to believe, that destroyed the happiness of her existence.[1]

In the middle of March, when the sisters had finished 'shirt-making for the absent Branwell,' Charlotte took a holiday to visit her friend, by which her health was improved. On her return she found Mr. Brontë and Emily well, and a letter from Branwell, intimating that he and Anne were pretty well, too.

Branwell visited Halifax on the 4th of July of this year. His health at that time was not so good as formerly, and his sisters noticed that he was excitable. Till within two or three months of his leaving Luddenden Foot, when he had attained his twenty-fifth year, though not strong, he had enjoyed good health, his spirits having almost always been good. In his youth, unlike Charlotte, he had had no experience of severe mental depression, no deep suffering from religious melancholy. It was only when he turned to reflection that he became serious, and

[1] 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph.'

that his thoughts were shaded with the sadness evinced in some of his early poems. Now, however, his nerve-force was less certain; and, being more easily excited, that exuberance of spirit and that elasticity of mind which had distinguished him showed symptoms of decay. It was not to be expected that he should retain his more youthful characteristics through life: and Charlotte has told us, about this time, that something within herself, which used to be enthusiasm, was tamed down and broken; she longed for an active stake in life. As she was unable to leave home, she endeavoured to open a School at Haworth Parsonage. Could she have obtained the promise of pupils, she proposed to build a wing to the house; but, after meeting with more or less encouragement, she found that it was quite impossible to induce anyone by preference to send children to a place so much exposed to wind and weather. The sisters were not sorry they had tried; and, it has been unjustifiably suggested, did not regret too much that they had failed, because they had fears and apprehensions respecting Branwell, and thought that the place that might be his abode could

scarcely be fitted for the home of the children of strangers. Branwell and Anne were at home again for the Christmas of 1844, and they returned to their duties early in the following January. In the course of that month Charlotte writes,

'Branwell has been quieter and less irritable, on the whole, than he was in the summer.'[1]

At this time there was no fear of his leaving his employment, and no fear that he would be dismissed from it; but a certain excitability and fitfulness of manner, a disposition to pass suddenly from gaiety to moody disquietude, which Anne had observed in her brother, had attracted, also, as has been seen, the serious attention of the other sisters, who were alarmed by it, and wondered greatly what the cause might be. And, indeed, a change had been coming over Branwell, for six months or more, a change which in the beginning had scarcely been understood by himself. A new feeling had impressed itself upon his heart that he had never experienced before, and against which he strove in vain. Branwell, in fact, who had never yet

[1] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii.

loved beyond the confines of his own home, had conceived an infatuated admiration for the wife of his employer, which afterwards, with his warm feelings, became a deep affection, and finally developed into a fierce and over-mastering passion. The lady who had dazzled and confused his understanding, as will presently appear, was unaware of the effect she had thus produced on the heart of the tutor, and he began to mistake her kindly, condescending manners for a return of his affection, an illusion which, as the sequel will show, he nursed to the very end of his life. Under this peculiar aberration of his mind, he cherished the hope that, as his employer was in feeble health, he might ere long be in a position to marry the widow, whom he believed to have already bestowed her affections upon him; when, being in easy circumstances, and possessed, as he termed it, of 'the priceless affluence of enduring peace,' he should be able, as he often declared, undisturbed by the usual perturbations of literary life, to make sure progress, and win for himself a name among the best authors of the day.

But at this period of his life Branwell is not

known to have written much verse, his mind being otherwise occupied. The two following beautiful sonnets, however, are from his pen, dated May, 1845, and are, together, entitled:

THE EMIGRANT.

'When sink from sight the landmarks of our home,
And,—all the bitterness of farewells o'er,—
We yield our spirit unto ocean's foam,
And in the new-born life which lies before,
On far Columbian or Australian shore,
Strive to exchange time past for time to come:,
How melancholy, then, if morn restore—
(Less welcome than the night's forgetful gloom)
Old England's blue hills to our sight again,
When we, our thoughts seemed weaning from her sky,—
That *pang* which wakes the almost silenced pain!
Thus, when the sick man lies, resigned to die,
A well-loved voice, a well-remembered strain,
Lets Time break harshly in upon Eternity.

'When, after his long day, consumed in toil,
'Neath the scarce welcome shade of unknown trees,
Upturning thanklessly a foreign soil,
The lonely exile seeks his evening ease,—
'Tis not those tropic woods his spirit sees;
Nor calms, to him, that heaven, this world's turmoil;
Nor cools his burning brow that spicy breeze.
Ah no! the gusty clouds of England's isle
Bring music wafted on their stormy wind,

And on its verdant meads, night's shadows lower,
While "Auld Lang Syne" the darkness calls to mind.
Thus, when the demon Thirst, beneath his power
The wanderer bows,—to feverish sleep consigned,
He hears the rushing rill, and feels the cooling shower.'

While Branwell's mind was rendered bright by the sunny hopes of a happy future, he was enabled to write with pathos, coherency, and beauty, as is shown in the foregoing sonnets. But it was his misfortune that his mind was hung too finely upon the balance, and that, as the phantasy of his affections grew upon him, he became, as will hereafter be demonstrated, the victim of an 'overheated and discursive imagination,' and at last 'betrayed that monomaniac tendency' which Lucy Snowe says she 'has ever thought the most unfortunate with which man or woman can be cursed.' He became, in fact, almost as soon as the new passion had taken full possession of his heart, a miserable victim to that morbid tendency of the mind which, in far lesser degree, characterized his sister Charlotte, and of which she seems to have lived in occasional dread. It may be noted that when Lucy Snowe is seeking wildly the letter,

which has been stolen away from her, she accuses herself of monomania. These mental perturbations grew upon Branwell day by day.

Time passed on; and, when he had been with his employer some two years and a half, during the concluding portion of which the control he had exercised over himself was giving way, he began to exhibit the strange irregularities of his disposition, and the irresistible fervour of his long-suppressed and feverish passion. Great patience and forbearance were exercised towards him by the lady of the house; and her sincere regard for the feelings of his family forbade her, on the first blush of the affair, to be the means of his dismissal from his employment. He was not, indeed, dismissed until the step became an absolute necessity. The banishment from his post was not, however, long delayed, for Branwell had lost his former self-control; and his imprudence overcame the reluctance of the lady, who at length made known to her husband, while Branwell was absent at home, on his holiday, in the July of 1845, what his conduct had been. A letter was at once sent to him by his employer, conveying the intimation of his dismissal.

We have been told much in Charlotte Brontë's letters to her friend 'E,' and in the works of Mrs. Gaskell and other writers, concerning this event, which laid prostrate the hopes of Branwell, that requires both comment and correction. We have already seen to what a low state of mind and body Branwell was for a time reduced by his dismissal from Luddenden Foot; but his condition in both was as that of sound health, compared with his utter prostration on his expulsion from his last employment,—a condition which renders any adequate description impossible. He had, indeed, been supremely happy. For him, the sun of prosperity had shone with unsullied splendour, and the rivers of hope had flowed with music richer and deeper than any of earth. The roses that bloomed in the paradise of his fervid imagination, were brighter—and, as he thought, far more lasting—than those, far-famed, of Suristan, and the green pastures of his hopeful aspirations were more fertile and fragrant than he had ever thought possible to him in the years gone by. But, suddenly, the paradise which his poetic and imaginative spirit had created, was changed, without a moment's warn-

ing, to a region of sleepless nights and wretched days,—'eleven continuous nights of sleepless horror' he afterwards speaks of,—where his mind, dismayed and incoherent, reeled and shook in agony intense and ungovernable.

The distress of the Brontë family on this reverse of Branwell's prospects can scarcely be conceived in its entirety. So deeply agonizing was the then state of his affairs, that they could think of nothing else; and, in their sorrow, had no heart to contemplate the future. It was under the immediate influence of this misery that Anne Brontë wrote her pathetic poem, 'Domestic Peace,' in which she deplores the changed conditions of the family. Charlotte had just returned home from a visit to her friend, and found her brother in the condition I have described. Thus she speaks of it, under the date of July the 31st, 1845: 'It was ten o'clock at night when I got home. I found Branwell ill. He is so very often, owing to his own fault. I was not therefore shocked at first. But when Anne informed me of the immediate cause of his present illness I was very greatly shocked. He had last Thurs-

day received a note from Mr. ——, sternly dismissing him . . . . . We have had sad work with him since. He thought of nothing but stunning or drowning his distressed mind. No one in the house could have rest, and at last we have been obliged to send him from home for a week with some one to look after him. He has written to me this morning, and expresses some sense of contrition for his frantic folly. He promises amendment on his return, but so long as he remains at home I scarce dare hope for peace in the house. We must all, I fear, prepare for a season of distress and disquietude. I cannot now ask Miss —— or anyone else.'

Branwell's distress had proved so really acute at the disgrace which had befallen him that Mr. Brontë, becoming alarmed for the consequences, decided to send his son away to new scenes in the hope of diverting his mind from the subject. That this was, to some extent, successful is evident from Branwell's letter to his sister, in which his natural feelings and repentant disposition found expression. Branwell had remembered his former visit to Liverpool, and selected

that place on this occasion, and sailed thence to the coast of Wales. The sad feelings that impressed him on the voyage were afterwards expressed in verse.

CHAPTER IV.

'BRANWELL'S FALL,' AS SET FORTH IN THE BIOGRAPHIES OF HIS SISTERS.

Branwell after his Disappointment—Parallel for his State of Mind in that of Lady Byron—Mrs. Gaskell's Misconceptions—True State of the Case—Charlotte Illustrates it in her Poem of 'Preference'—She alludes to Branwell's Condition in 'The Professor'—Mrs. Gaskell Compelled to Omit her Account in the Later Editions of her Work—Branwell's Prostration and Ill-health at the Time.

AFTER the first shock to his feelings had been sustained, and, by its own intensity, toned down to less oppressive anguish and pain, a strange calm succeeded in Branwell, more agonizing and appalling to his friends than the stormy ebullitions which had preceded it. There is evidence that his family at this time misunderstood the actual state of his mind, and that their

very anxiety about him caused them—but more especially Charlotte—to regard his acts, irresponsible though they might be, as inveterate offences and habitual sins. It has indeed been said by some that Charlotte did not afterwards speak to him for the space of two years.

The reproaches of his sister were probably as unwise as they were passionate, unmeasured, and, in outward semblance, unfeeling; yet they were censures pronounced in momentary anger, utterances of the deep affection she had for her brother, and of sincere sorrow for his unhappy, hopeless, and insane passion. But Branwell's friends and acquaintances saw clearly that on one subject, and one only, his mind had given way; and that was in his conception of the undoubted love which the lady of his heart bore him. They also saw, notwithstanding this morbid perversion of the ordinary powers of his mind in one particular illusion, that he was not affected in his faculty of reasoning correctly and consistently on all other subjects. They knew, if the Brontë family did not, that Branwell's mind, naturally morbid and depressed,

had been unhinged by the sudden and unexpected ruin of his hopes; and that his heart and his intellect had been so far bruised and wounded, that for many of the acts done, and the things said, under the abiding grief which followed it, he was irresponsible. This will shortly appear.

The sisters did not, however, long remain in ignorance of the true state of Branwell's mind. They became aware that he suffered from monomania touching the object of his sorrow, and the circumstance impressed them exceedingly. In several of their novels they have, indeed, dwelt upon this condition, and have lamented the misery and mental prostration which it entails. Lucy Snowe suffers from it severely, as I have mentioned. But, in 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' one of the characters charges Gilbert Markham — whose circumstances are precisely those of Branwell in regard to his love for a married lady—with monomania in this very matter; and, in 'Wuthering Heights,' speaking of the events that preceded Heathcliff's death, Nelly Dean alleges that he suffers from monomania in his love for the wife of Edgar Linton.

Branwell's sisters, however, never took the tragic view of his conduct that impressed Mrs. Gaskell.

For a time Branwell could talk of nothing but of the lady to whom he was attached, and he made statements of circumstances regarding her which had no foundation but in his own heated imagination. The lady, he said, loved him to distraction. She was in a state of inconceivable agony at his loss. Her husband, cruel, brutal, and unfeeling, threatened her with his dire indignation, and deprivation of every comfort. Branwell, indeed, told his friend W——, by letter, that, in consequence of this persecution, the suffering lady 'had placed herself under his protection!' and many other stories, equally unfounded, extravagant, and impossible, were circulated. In a word, he went about among his friends, telling to each, in strict confidence, the woes under which he suffered, and painting in gloomy colours the miseries which the lady of his love had been compelled to undergo. If all other proof were wanting of the unsound state of Branwell's mind on this one point, it would be enough, in all conscience, that he proclaim-

ed abroad, of the lady he undertook to protect, circumstances that must infallibly redound to her infamy; and which, indeed, in the hands of injudicious persons, gave rise to the public scandal of his life, and ultimately made his name, and that of the lady whom he had loved and traduced in the same breath, of reproach among men.[1]

For Branwell's state of mind at this time, and for the circumstances that followed upon it, we have an exact parallel in the case of Lady Byron, after her separation from her husband. This unhappy lady, living in retirement with her friends, had maintained, for more than five years after the poet's death, relations of the

[1] The condition into which Branwell fell at this period is one very well known to mental physiologists. Thus Carpenter speaks of it: 'In most forms of monomania, there is more or less of disorder in the *ideational* process, leading to the formation of positive *delusions* or *hallucinations*, that is to say, of fixed beliefs or dominant ideas which are palpably inconsistent with reality. These delusions, however, are not attributable to original perversions of the reasoning process, but arise out of the perverted *emotional state*. They give rise, in the first place, to *misinterpretation of actual facts* or *occurrences*, in accordance with the prevalent state of the feelings.'—'Principles of Mental Physiology,' (1874), p. 667.

most friendly nature with his sister, the Honourable Mrs. Leigh. But, at the end of that period, weakened by misfortunes and by brooding upon particular evils, her mind gave way on one point; and she made, in the full belief of their truth, the most horrible of charges against her dead husband and his sister. These charges were, by some people, believed for a time; but a very little reflection showed that Lady Byron's mind must have been unhinged, for all the acts of her life went to disprove the statements she made. It was not in the nature of things possible that she could remain on affectionate terms with her sister-in-law, had she known—as in her monomania she asserted she did—the utter depth of that sister-in-law's imagined infamy. But it is not to be supposed that the unhappy lady was visibly insane; she was, on the contrary, as all remarked, gifted with a clear and accurate observation, with a lucid and logical method of thought, and with an expression more than ordinarily calm and natural.

It was precisely the same with Branwell Brontë; for, when the paroxysm of his grief was over, though he was ordinarily calm and

his thoughts always clear and logical, strange impressions and misinterpretations of facts grew upon him, and he made, with all the certainty of belief, statements of circumstances relating to the lady of his dearest affections, redounding to her shame—which, had he been of sound mind, he must not only have known to be false, but would have carried, had they been true, in secrecy to the grave.

Just, too, as Lady Byron whispered the story of her woes in strict faith to many people, so did Branwell Brontë make confidants of several friends, revealing to each the extent of his misfortunes. And, further, just as the story circulated by Lady Byron was confided among others to good, honest, well-meaning Mrs. Beecher Stowe, who, conceiving herself to be the chosen champion of oppressed virtue, rushed into print, in 'Macmillan' of September, 1869, with the literary *bonne-bouche* she had received; so did Mrs. Gaskell, clad in like panoply, with anger far over-riding discretion, publish to the world the scandal she had collected from the busy *gobe-mouches* of Haworth, to the utter undoing of the fair fame of Patrick Branwell

Brontë, and of the lady on whom he had fixed his hopeless affection. The scandal which was spread about Lord Byron, through the delusions of his wife, was very soon overthrown; but that with which Branwell was concerned, though thirty-seven years have passed over his grave, has been republished and is still believed—all the biographers of his sisters having, with one accord, consigned his name to obloquy and contempt.

The stories originated by Branwell lost nothing in their circulation, but they gained immensely; and years had made the tales of disappointed love into scandals unfit to be detailed, when Mrs. Gaskell, eager for information, visited Haworth, and collected materials for her work from too-willing hands, who added their own embellishments to the original statements of Branwell.

In order to show how far Mrs. Gaskell deviated from the right direction in her account of these circumstances, it will be better to place before the reader much of what she has said in direct reference to it, so that the whole matter may be made plain; and, before he closes this

book, he will probably be convinced that she was wholly misled in her version of the story.

Mrs. Gaskell writes: 'All the disgraceful details came out. Branwell was in no state to conceal his agony of remorse, or, strange to say, his agony of guilty love, from any dread of shame. He gave passionate way to his feelings; he shocked and distressed those loving sisters inexpressibly; the blind father sat stunned, sorely tempted to curse the profligate woman who had tempted his boy—his only son—into the deep disgrace of deadly crime.

'All the variations of spirits and of temper—the reckless gaiety, the moping gloom of many months were now explained. There was a reason deeper than any mere indulgence of appetite, to account for his intemperance; he began his career as an habitual drunkard to drown remorse.

'The pitiable part, as far as he was concerned, was the yearning love he still bore to the woman who had got so strong a hold upon him. It is true, that she professed equal love; we shall see how her professions held good. There was a strange lingering of conscience, when, meeting

her clandestinely by appointment at Harrogate some months after, he refused to consent to the elopement which she proposed; there was some good left in this corrupted, weak young man, even to the very last of his miserable days. The case presents the reverse of the usual features: the man became the victim; the man's life was blighted, and crushed out of him by suffering, and guilt entailed by guilt; the man's family were stung by keenest shame. The woman—to think of her father's pious name—the blood of honourable families mixed in her veins—her early home, underneath whose roof-tree sat those whose names are held saint-like for their good deeds,—she goes flaunting about to this day in respectable society; a showy woman for her age; kept afloat by her reputed wealth. I see her name in county papers, as one of those who patronize the Christmas balls; and I hear of her in London drawing-rooms. Now let us read, not merely of the suffering of her guilty accomplice, but of the misery she caused to innocent victims, whose premature deaths may, in part, be laid at her door.'[1]

[1] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii., 1st edition.

Mrs. Gaskell further states: 'A few months later the invalid husband of the woman with whom he had intrigued, died. Branwell had been looking forward to this event with guilty hope. After her husband's death, his paramour would be free; strange as it seems, the young man still loved her passionately, and now he imagined the time was come when they might look forward to being married, and live together without reproach or blame. She had offered to elope with him; she had written to him perpetually; she had sent him money—twenty pounds at a time; he remembered the criminal advances she had made; she had braved shame, and her children's menaced disclosures, for his sake; he thought she must love him; he little knew how bad a depraved woman can be.'[1]

As Mrs. Gaskell had formed no conception of the possible state of Branwell's mind, she seems to have known no reason for doubting the absolute truth of what she had heard; and, with an overweening confidence, and with no deficient expression of righteous indignation, she deals

[1] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii., 1st edition.

with the episode in this startling manner.

In support of the charges thus made, Mrs. Gaskell refers to the contents of the will of the lady's husband, by which, she says, what property he left to his wife was so left on the condition that she never saw Branwell again; and she adds that, on the death of her husband, the lady sent her coachman to Haworth; for, at the very time when the will was being read, she did not know but that Branwell might be on his way to her. Mrs. Gaskell furthers says that, after the interview with the coachman, Branwell was found utterly prostrated by the intimation that he must never again even see the lady whom he thought he might then marry.[1]

The biographer of Charlotte, having obtained her information from the floating rumours of Haworth, formed an inconsiderate, erroneous, and hasty opinion on this affair and its supposed consequences. But she found many circumstances in the proceedings of Branwell and his sisters which failed to corroborate her views, and that were, in fact, at variance with what would naturally have been expected had Branwell's

[1] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii., 1st edition.

misconduct really been of so deep a dye as she states. In order to bring out fully the force of what she here says, Mrs. Gaskell had, previously, as we have seen, in speaking of Charlotte's stay in Brussels eighteen months before, alluded to intelligence from home calculated to distress Charlotte exceedingly with fears respecting Branwell. Yet, in the January of 1844, shortly after her return from Brussels, Charlotte told her friend 'E' that Anne and Branwell were 'both wonderfully valued in their situations.' And again, writing of the year 1845, Mrs. Gaskell says: 'He was so beguiled by this mature and wicked woman, that he went home for his holidays reluctantly, stayed there as short a time as possible, perplexing and distressing them all by his extraordinary conduct—at one time in the highest spirits; at another, in the deepest depression—accusing himself of blackest guilt and treachery, without specifying what they were; and altogether evincing an irritability of disposition bordering on insanity. Charlotte and her sister suffered acutely from his mysterious behaviour . . . . . an indistinct dread was creeping over their minds that he might turn

out their deep disgrace.'[1] And it must be added that, when in the expurgated edition the opening of this passage was omitted, Mrs. Gaskell inserted—following where she ascribes to the sisters an 'indistinct dread,'—these words: 'caused partly by his own conduct, partly by expressions of agonizing suspicion in Anne's letters home.'[2] But we know, from Charlotte's letter to her friend, that, when she had returned home and found Branwell ill, which she says he was often, she was not therefore shocked at first, but, when Anne informed her of the immediate cause of his present illness, she was very greatly shocked, showing clearly enough that Branwell's dismissal and its cause were a complete surprise to her when she heard of them. How, then, could Anne's letters home have contained expressions of 'agonizing suspicion'?

Mrs. Gaskell found it necessary to summarize the portion of Charlotte's letter which contained these expressions of surprise, and, in her version, significantly enough, the obvious inconsistency

[1] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii.. 1st edition.
[2] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. v., 1860 edition.

is lost. The succeeding part also has suffered mutilation in Mrs. Gaskell's work, Charlotte's allusion to Branwell's 'frantic folly,' and the sentence, 'He promises amendment on his return,' being entirely omitted. Mr. Wemyss Reid, in publishing this letter, points out the circumstance, and says that 'Mrs. Gaskell could not bring herself to speak of such flagrant sins as those of which young Brontë had been guilty under the name of folly, nor could she conceive that there was any possibility of amendment on the part of one who had fallen so low in vice.'[1] And, if we disregard Mrs. Gaskell's view of 'what *should have been*' Charlotte's feelings, and read the letter with the real state of the case before us, we shall at once see that, as Branwell had not fallen low in vice, the term 'frantic folly,' which his sister employed in speaking of his conduct, was precisely that which justly described it.

The simple truth respecting Branwell's conduct is this: he had been too fond of company and had not escaped its penalty. Doubtless Anne occasionally saw influences upon her brother

[1] 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' chap. vii.

which she would have wished entirely absent. Moreover he had, as we have seen, become wildly in love. Reluctantly at first, and, from what we know of him, he may, probably, in his latest vacation have accused himself of 'blackest guilt.' But there is reason to believe that on this episode, as on others connected with Branwell Brontë, we have been told not a little of what *must have ensued* from a standpoint of initial error.

Of the principal accusations which Mrs. Gaskell brings against Mrs. —— I shall have to speak when I come to consider the consequences to Branwell of the final defeat of his hopes; but it may be said here that it is clear the lady never wrote letters to Branwell at all. She carefully avoided doing anything that might implicate her in the matter of Branwell's strange passion, and, so far as any provision of the husband's will, which was dated near the end of the year, is concerned, Branwell Brontë might never have existed. Mrs. Gaskell cannot have seen the document.

If any further evidence of the view Charlotte Brontë took of Branwell's conduct, and of that

of the lady whose character has been so much calumniated be needed, her poem entitled 'Preference' is sufficient. We may indeed infer from it that Charlotte herself never believed the stories concerning Mrs. —— which were in circulation at the time, and that she has left, in this production of her pen, her version of how the circumstances truly stood. The lady is represented in the poem as censuring the person who is making advances to her, and who is addressed as a soldier for whom she has a sisterly regard, while she is devotedly attached to one of whom she speaks in the warmest terms.

'Not in scorn do I reprove thee,
Not in pride thy vows I waive,
But, believe, I could not love thee,
Wert thou prince, and I a slave.'

She then tells him that he is deceiving himself in thinking she has secret affection for him, and that her coldness towards him is assumed. She appeals forcibly to her own personal bearing as proof that she has no love for him.

'Touch my hand, thou self-deceiver;
Nay—be calm, for I am so;

Does it burn? Does my lip quiver?
Has mine eye a troubled glow?
Canst thou call a moment's colour
To my forehead—to my cheek?
Canst thou tinge their tranquil pallor
With one flattering, feverish streak?'

Declaring that her goodwill for him is sisterly, she thus continues:

'Rave not, rage not, wrath is fruitless,
Fury cannot change my mind;
I but deem the feeling rootless
Which so whirls in passion's wind.
Can I love? Oh, deeply—truly—
Warmly—fondly—but not thee;
And my love is answered duly,
With an equal energy.'

Then she tells him, if he would see his rival, to draw a curtain aside, when he will observe him, seated in a place shaded by trees, surrounded with books, and employing his 'unresting pen.' Here Charlotte places the 'rival' in an alcove, in the grounds of his mansion, privately employing his leisure in the retirement of his home; and makes the lady show her husband to the soldier who addresses her. She says:

'There he sits—the first of men!
Man of conscience—man of reason;
Stern, perchance, but ever just;
Foe to falsehood, wrong, and treason,
Honour's shield and virtue's trust!
Worker, thinker, firm defender
Of Heaven's truth—man's liberty;
Soul of iron—proof to slander,
Rock where founders tyranny.'

She declares that her faith is given, and therefore the person she addresses need not sue; for, while God reigns in earth and heaven, she will be faithful to the man of her heart, to whom she is immovably devoted; and who is a 'defender of Heaven's truth'—her husband.

No one, perhaps, would be better acquainted than Charlotte with the false and foul calumnies on this head, then circulating through the village; and it is well that she has left, in her poem of 'Preference,' an expression of her feeling as to the affairs which caused so much injurious gossip at the time. Yet, however desirous Charlotte might be, in this poem, to clear the character of the lady who has been so cruelly aspersed, she appears to have had no mercy on her brother, who had been the principal actor in the drama. The following is

the picture of him, in reference to this sad episode, which she puts into the mouth of William Crimsworth in 'The Professor':

'Limited as had yet been my experience of life,' he says, 'I had once had the opportunity of contemplating, near at hand, an example of the results produced by a course of interesting and romantic domestic treachery. No golden halo of fiction was about this example; I saw it bare and real; and it was very loathsome. I saw a mind degraded by the practice of mean subterfuge, by the habit of perfidious deception, and a body depraved by the infectious influence of the vice-polluted soul. I had suffered much from the forced and prolonged view of this spectacle; those sufferings I did not now regret, for their simple recollection acted as a most wholesome antidote to temptation. They had inscribed on my reason the conviction that unlawful pleasure, trenching on another's rights, is delusive and envenomed pleasure—its hollowness disappoints at the time, its poison cruelly tortures afterwards, its effects deprave for ever.' It is probable that Charlotte would not have wished this passage to be applied literally to her

brother; but, unfortunately, this, and similar unguarded declarations, have largely biassed almost all who have written on the lives and literature of the sisters.

Mrs. Gaskell, under threat of ulterior proceedings, on the advice of her friends, published the edition of 1860, omitting the charges referred to, as well as those against Mr. Brontë. She did not, however, allow the effect of her first assumption of guilt, or the moral of the tale, to be lost. She inserted a few sentences intended to convey to the reader that something of the kind had gone wrong with Branwell in the place where his sister Anne was governess. Under the circumstances, therefore, I have felt it necessary to deal with the subject at large.

It may be remarked here that the indignation of the injured lady knew no bounds, and that she was only dissuaded from carrying the matter to a trial by the earnest desire of her friends, who represented that Mrs. Gaskell could not substantiate her statements, and that, as the book could not therefore be reprinted as it stood, and its circulation was consequently limited, it were better to let the matter rest, rather than incur

the wide-spread reports of the newspaper press when the trial should be before the public; and, moreover, that those who knew her did not believe a word of Mrs. Gaskell's unfounded allegations. This had its effect, and the lady fretfully acquiesced.[1]

In Miss Robinson's 'Emily Brontë,' the stories which Charlotte's biographer was compelled to omit, have been substantially reproduced; and this writer, in supporting similar views to those of Mrs. Gaskell, has found it necessary to quote her version of the letter containing Charlotte's account of Branwell's disgrace, and has also considerably enlarged upon the supposed contents of the letters of Anne. Much diffidence has been felt in dealing with this subject so closely; but, after the discussion of it in the public prints, consequent on the issue of Miss Robinson's book, it is thought the time has come

[1] A gentleman with whom I have recently conversed, who knew this lady personally, on seeing the first edition of Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' expressed his astonishment at the 'gross form of the libel,' of which he had had no conception. He had good reason for entirely disbelieving the stories, for which Mrs. Gaskell was responsible, relating to the lady in question.

for exposing the groundlessness of the stories. The reader will therefore observe that I have borne this matter in mind throughout the present work.

The distraction that overwhelmed Branwell on his dismissal from his late employment having caused him eleven nights of 'sleepless horror,' his wild attempt to drown his sorrow brought on an attack of delirium tremens. On one of these nights, in all likelihood, suddenly falling asleep, he overturned the candle and set the bed-clothes on fire. The smell of burning attracted attention, and the sisters rushed into the room to extinguish the smouldering material. This accident would, doubtless, have been lost sight of, had it not been for the researches of Miss Robinson, to whom the public is indebted for an account of the circumstance, which closely reminds us of the rescue of Mr. Rochester in 'Jane Eyre,' and of the removal of 'Keeper,' by Emily, from the best bed in which he had settled himself. It will be remembered also that, on the night when Mr. Lockwood stayed at Wuthering Heights, a similar accident befel him, through the candle falling against the books he was trying to read.

On his return from Wales Branwell wrote to his friend Leyland, who had to visit Haworth professionally, pressing him to come to the parsonage. Thus he writes in the midst of his distress. The vision of his hopes had become a haunting picture of misery, the prospect of the lady becoming free to marry him had not arisen to his mind in his confusion; he would never see her again, he would be forgotten; he must communicate with her.

'Haworth, August 4, 1845.

'DEAR SIR,

'I need hardly say that I shall be most delighted to see you, as God knows I have a tolerably heavy load on my mind just now, and would look to an hour spent with one like yourself, as a means of at least, temporarily, lightening it.

'I returned yesterday from a week's journey to Liverpool and North Wales, but I found during my absence that, wherever I went, a certain woman robed in black, and calling herself "MISERY," walked by my side, and leant on my arm, as affectionately as if she were my legal wife.

'Like some other husbands, I could have spared her presence.

'Yours most sincerely,

'P. B. BRONTË.'

There are in one or two of Charlotte Brontë's letters, written during this month, allusions to her brother. She tells us that things are not very bright as regards him, though his health, and consequently his temper, have been somewhat better this last day or two, because he is now '*forced* to abstain.' And again, on the 18th, 'My hopes ebb low indeed about Branwell. I sometimes fear he will never be fit for much. The late blow to his prospects and feelings has quite made him reckless.'

On the 19th, Branwell sends a short note to Leyland, in which he says, 'As to my own affairs, I only wish I could see one gleam of light amid their gloom. You, I hope, are well and cheerful.'

CHAPTER V.

BRANWELL'S PROJECTED NOVEL.

Review of Branwell's past Experiences of Life—He seeks Relief in Literary Occupation—He Proposes to Write a Three-volume Novel—His Letter on the Subject—One Volume Completed—His Capability of Writing a Novel—His Letter to Mr Grundy on his Disappointment.

BRANWELL had now attained his twenty-eighth year. The reader has seen in the early part of this work the intellectual promise of his opening career, the evidences of his genius, his versatility, and his mental power, and has marked the paths by which he, who was expected to be the crowning light of that remarkable family, had been brought, step by step, to the very depths of misery.

During the few short years of his life, Branwell

Brontë, having tasted the sweets of a noble ambition, and surrendered himself to the influences of love, had suffered the agonies of his disappointment and disgrace, and was now feeling the very bitterness of despair. Such influences as these, shaking the soul with their tempestuous breath, cast their sad glamour on the imagination; and he who has felt the spell is impressed thenceforth more deeply with the wondrous story of life, with the struggle of being, and with the fulness of emotion, and has a far deeper insight into the mysteries of human nature. It was in this way that Byron, when he had passed through his greatest misfortunes, and had abandoned for ever the shores of England, was fired with the gloomy glory of 'Manfred' and of 'Cain.' This storm and stress of the feelings, when the imagination receives a higher consciousness, is as the Eddaic struggle of Sigurd with Fafnir, the drinking of the monster's blood, that taught to the dragon-slayer the mystic language of the birds. The reader will see how these influences told on Branwell Brontë, and how sad the voices of the birds were for him; how his muse was inspired with the

note of misery, and his longing was for peace alone. There seemed, indeed, to be no hope in those days.

However, there came at times to Branwell Brontë, as there must come to all men in his circumstances, a reaction from the consuming sorrow of despair, a longing for action, for mental stimulus, to divert his mind from the woe he should never be able to forget. And, with this change in his methods of thought, there grew upon him another feeling, engendered of his broken sympathy with the actions of his kind: he learned to look upon human affairs as a spectator, rather than as one who felt any personal interest in them. It was in this way that his experience seemed to him to have unveiled the hidden springs of the actions of men; and, in recognizing the selfishness of them, he became himself something of a cynic.

Branwell was in this frame of mind when he resolved, soon after a visit to his friend Leyland, —whom he found engaged upon a tomb and recumbent statue of the late Doctor Stephen Beckwith, a benefactor to several public institutions in York, to be erected in the Minster there,

—to make an effort to arouse himself. With the desire, then, of finding an absorbing occupation for his mind, by which he might be able to lay the tempest of the heart, the whirlwind of wounded vanity, of injured self-esteem, and of blighted hope, which swept through his mind in hours of reflection, and drove him to distraction or desperation, he turned, with the resolution of a new-born energy, engendered of despair, to literary composition. He proposed to himself to depict, as best he could, in a fictitious form, and as an ordinary novel, which should extend to three volumes, the different feelings that work in the human soul. The necessary labour which this undertaking involved, gave a stimulus to his ambition, which for a time was sustained; and he evidently hoped that he might yet be able to make a place for himself in the busy world of letters. At this time the novels of his sisters were not in existence, and probably had scarcely been dreamed of. Charlotte had not yet lighted on the volume of verse in the handwriting of Emily, and the literary future of the sisters had still to dawn upon them. Yet Branwell, whose behaviour had given them

cause enough for disquietude, and whose sorrows were embittering his mind, had now braced himself up for an object which they had not attempted, and to the accomplishment of which he looked forward with something like confidence. In the following letter to his friend Leyland, he discloses his design; and it is probable that in this we have almost all the direct light upon it which can be found:—

'Haworth, Sept. 10th, 1845.

'MY DEAR SIR,

'I was certainly sadly disappointed at not having seen you on the Friday you named for your visit, but the cause you allege for not arriving was justifiable with a vengeance. I should have been as cracked as my cast had I entered a room and seen the labour of weeks or months destroyed (apparently—not, I trust, really) in a moment.[1]

'That vexation is, I hope, over; and I build upon your renewed promise of a visit; for nothing cheers me so much as the company of one

[1] Branwell here speaks of an accident which had happened to one part of the monument referred to above.

whom I believe to be a *man*, and who has known care well enough to be able to appreciate the discomfort of another who knows it *too* well.

'Never mind the lines I put into your hands, but come hither with them, and, if they should have been lost out of your pocket on the way, I won't grumble, provided you are present to apologize for the accident.

'I have, since I saw you at Halifax, devoted my hours of time, snatched from downright illness, to the composition of a three-volume *novel*, one volume of which is completed, and, along with the two forthcoming ones, has been really the result of half-a-dozen by-past years of thoughts about, and experience in, this crooked path of life.

'I felt that I must rouse myself to attempt something while roasting daily and nightly over a slow fire, to while away my torments; and I knew that, in the present state of the publishing and reading world, a novel is the most saleable article, so that—where ten pounds would be offered for a work, the production of which would require the utmost stretch of a man's

intellect—two hundred pounds would be a refused offer for three volumes, whose composition would require the smoking of a cigar and the humming of a tune.

'My novel is the result of years of thought; and, if it gives a vivid picture of human feelings for good and evil, veiled by the cloak of deceit which must enwrap man and woman; if it records, as faithfully as the pages that unveil man's heart in "Hamlet" or "Lear," the conflicting feelings and clashing pursuits in our uncertain path through life, I shall be as much gratified (and as much astonished) as I should be if, in betting that I could jump over the Mersey, I jumped over the Irish Sea. It would not be more pleasant to light on Dublin instead of Birkenhead, than to leap from the present bathos of fictitious literature to the firmly-fixed rock honoured by the foot of a Smollett or a Fielding.

'That jump I expect to take when I can model a rival to your noble Theseus, who haunted my dreams when I slept after seeing him. But, meanwhile, I can try my utmost to rouse myself from almost killing cares, and that alone will be its own reward.

'Tell me when I may hope to see you, and believe me, dear sir,

'Yours,

'P. B. BRONTË.'

A spirited sketch in pen-and-ink concludes this letter; it represents a bust of himself thrown down, and the lady of his admiration holding forth her hands towards it with an air of pity, while underneath it is the sentence: 'A cast, cast down, but not cast away!'[1]

We have in this letter an instance of Branwell's general coherency under his disappointment, in which the elegance and freedom of his style of composition are combined with a consequent and logical arrangement of the various parts of his subject; but he cannot help concluding his letter with a direct allusion to the lady, whom he believes,—all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding,—to love him with undiminished devotion. Under this fascination he still hopes for the prosperity and happiness of which he had before spoken to his friends.

[1] Charlotte Brontë told her friend 'Mary,' that Branwell had appropriated Cowper's poem, 'The Castaway.'

Moreover it will be seen, from Branwell's letter, that he had seriously undertaken, in the midst of sorrow, suffering, and ill-health,—though, I have reason to believe, that he had sketched some part of it during his tutorship—the production of a novel, one volume of which he had completed. He does not seem to have looked upon it as a great mental effort, but rather as the natural outcome of a painful experience, and the proper alleviation of a present misery. Yet he designed to give a vivid picture of human nature; and, with the strength of experience and the consciousness of power, he evidently hoped that it would be a better work than those productions of the day, of whose composition he speaks so lightly. His experience had, indeed, been such as would well enable one of his quick perception to grasp the character, feelings, and motives of those around him. His knowledge of the country people of the West-Riding was very great; for, sitting, the admired of all observers, in the 'Black Bull,' at Haworth, he had met representatives of all classes of them. By the parlour fire, in the long winter evenings, he had had opportunities enough of entering into

the spirit of the people; indeed, his letter to John Brown has shown us how he reviewed some of them. It was not merely for the enjoyment of an hour that he came to their company: he had longed for a glimpse of other life than that lived at the parsonage. And the Yorkshire peasants—whom he nevertheless held at their true value—to those who know their dialect, and can enter into their pursuits, as Branwell did and could, disclose a fund of shrewd observation, a sharp understanding, and a free and natural wit; and they delight in telling the stories of all the country side. But they must be understood before they can be appreciated. Branwell, too, had been a guest at the homesteads of the farmers, in the neighbourhood where he had latterly resided, who were always pleased to see him, when he visited them. But he had had experience of more fiery emotions than those of peasants; he had longed to know something of the deeper life of London, and had found it, at last, in the company of pugilists and their patrons.

When the mood was upon him, all these varied experiences flowed with voluble elo-

quence from his lips; and the brightness of his wit and the brilliance of his imagination made him, at such times, a most enjoyable companion. But he delighted above all things, as has been seen, to spend his evenings, when possible, with the little band of literati which, in those times, characterized that district; and, in the society of Storey the poet of Wharfe, James the historian of Bradford, George Searle Phillips, Leyland the sculptor, and others, he found emulation and stimulus to better things. But the uses to which, under such influences, he put his experiences of life, and the colour that was given to them through his maddening misfortunes—so far as his novel is concerned—can probably never be told. His experience in 'this crooked path of life,' during his last half-dozen years, had been sufficiently varied; and an instructive story he could doubtless have based upon it. But, what became of the volume he wrote, possibly no one can tell; and his intention of writing two more was probably not carried out.

From the following letter which Branwell wrote to Mr. Grundy in the October of 1845, we learn something of the condition of mind

under which he must have written; and, from an allusion which it contains, we may, probably, infer that he had abandoned his intention of writing the two other volumes of his novel.[1] He says:

'I fear you will burn my present letter on recognising the handwriting; but if you will read it through, you will perhaps rather pity than spurn the distress of mind which could prompt my communication, after a silence of nearly three (to me) eventful years. While very ill and confined to my room, I wrote to you two months ago, hearing you were resident engineer of the Skipton Railway, to the inn at Skipton. I never received any reply, and as my letter asked only for one day of your society, to ease a very weary mind in the company of a friend who *always* had what I always wanted, but most want now, *cheerfulness*, I am sure you never received my letter, or your heart would have prompted an answer.

[1] Mr. Grundy has assigned the date of this letter to within a few months of January, 1848; but, from internal evidence, it is clear that it belongs really to the period I have named.

'Since I last shook hands with you in Halifax, two summers ago, my life, till lately, has been one of apparent happiness and indulgence. You will ask, "Why does he complain, then?" I can only reply by showing the under-current of distress which bore my bark to a whirlpool, despite the surface waves of life that seemed floating me to peace. In a letter begun in the spring of 1845 and never finished, owing to incessant attacks of illness, I tried to tell you that I was tutor to the son of ——, a wealthy gentleman whose wife is sister to the wife of ——, M.P. for the county of ——, and the cousin of Lord ——. This lady (though her husband detested me) showed me a degree of kindness which, when I was deeply grieved one day at her husband's conduct, ripened into declarations of more than ordinary feeling. My admiration of her mental and personal attractions, my knowledge of her unselfish sincerity, her sweet temper, and unwearied care for others, with but unrequited return where most should have been given . . . . although she is seventeen years my senior, all combined to an attachment on my part, and led to reciprocations

which I had little looked for. During nearly three years I had daily "troubled pleasure, soon chastised by fear." Three months since I received a furious letter from my employer, threatening to shoot me if I returned from my vacation, which I was passing at home; and letters from her lady's-maid and physician informed me of the outbreak, only checked by her firm courage and resolution that whatever harm came to her, none should come to me . . . . I have lain during nine long weeks, utterly shattered in body and broken down in mind. The probability of her becoming free to give me herself and estate never rose to drive away the prospect of her decline under her present grief. I dreaded, too, the wreck of my mind and body, which, God knows! during a short life have been severely tried. Eleven continuous nights of sleepless horror reduced me to almost blindness; and, being taken into Wales to recover, the sweet scenery, the sea, the sound of music caused me fits of unspeakable distress. You will say, "What a fool!" but if you knew the many causes I have for sorrow, which I cannot even hint at here, you would

perhaps pity as well as blame. At the kind request of Mr. Macaulay and Mr. Baines, I have striven to arouse my mind by writing something worthy of being read, but I really cannot do so. Of course you will despise the writer of all this. I can only answer that the writer does the same, and would not wish to live if he did not hope that work and change may yet restore him.

'Apologizing sincerely for what seems like whining egotism, and hardly daring to hint about the days when, in your company, I could sometimes sink the thoughts which "remind me of departed days," I fear departed never to return,—I remain, etc.'

In this letter we see that Branwell details to Mr. Grundy the story about Mrs. ——, which he was publishing whenever he could obtain a hearing. He speaks, too, of his ill-health, the shattering of body and the breaking down of mind, which at the time prostrated him. Charlotte seems scarcely to have credited Branwell's representations of the bodily condition into which he had fallen; for she says, in one of her letters, a little later, 'Branwell offers no pros-

pect of hope: he professes to be too ill to think of seeking employment."[1] There are passages of a like tendency in others of Charlotte's letters about this time; but we shall see presently that, whatever might be his condition of health, he was by no means so unsolicitous for employment, or so heedless of the future, as she supposed.

[1] 'Unpublished Letters of Charlotte Brontë,' *Hours at Home*, xi.

CHAPTER VI.

'REAL REST.'—'PENMAENMAWR.'

'Real Rest'—Comments—Spirit of Branwell and Emily Identical—Letter to Leyland—Branwell Broods on his Sorrows—'Penmaenmawr'—Comments—He still Searches and Hopes for Employment—Charlotte's somewhat Overdrawn Expressions—The Alleged Elopement Proposal—Probable Origin of the Story.

THOUGH Branwell Brontë was so feeble in health that, despite his wishes, he found physical labour impossible, and though the reaction from utter despair—through whose impetus he completed one volume of his novel—had been followed by a condition which led him to think worthy literary work beyond his power, we find him, almost at the same time, writing two of the finest poems which remain from his hand. It has been seen, in the letter addressed to Mr.

Grundy, how he declares that, owing to the state of his mind, he is unable to undertake any literary work worth reading. But we have certain knowledge of an immediate movement of his genius, and that it found expression in verse, which gave a free course to his feelings. In the following poem we have perhaps the most powerful and weird expression of inconsolable sorrow ever penned. A strange calm had now succeeded the storms of feeling its author had passed through.

REAL REST.

'I see a corpse upon the waters lie,
With eyes turned, swelled and sightless, to the sky,
And arms outstretched to move, as wave on wave
Upbears it in its boundless billowy grave.
Not time, but ocean, thins its flowing hair;
Decay, not sorrow, lays its forehead bare;
Its members move, but not in thankless toil,
For seas are milder than this world's turmoil;
Corruption robs its lips and cheeks of red,
But wounded vanity grieves not the dead;
And, though those members hasten to decay,
No pang of suffering takes their strength away.
With untormented eye, and heart, and brain,
Through calm and storm it floats across the main;

Though love and joy have perished long ago,
Its bosom suffers not one pang of woe;
Though weeds and worms its cherished beauty hide,
It feels not wounded vanity nor pride;
Though journeying towards some far-off shore,
It needs no care nor gold to float it o'er;
Though launched in voyage for eternity,
It need not think upon what is *to be;*
Though naked, helpless, and companionless,
It feels not poverty, nor knows distress.

'Ah, corpse! if thou couldst tell my aching mind
What scenes of sorrow thou hast left behind,
How sad the life which, breathing, thou hast led,
How free from strife thy sojourn with the dead;
I would assume thy place—would long to be
A world-wide wanderer o'er the waves with thee!
I have a misery, where thou hast none;
My heart beats, bursting, whilst thine lies like stone;
My veins throb wild, whilst thine are dead and dry;
And woes, not waters, dim my restless eye;
Thou longest not with one well loved to be,
And absence does not break a chain with thee;
No sudden agonies dart through thy breast;
Thou hast what all men covet,—Real Rest.
I have an outward frame, unlike to thine,
Warm with young life—not cold in death's decline;
An eye that sees the sunny light of Heaven,—
A heart by pleasure thrilled, by anguish riven—
But, in exchange for thy untroubled calm,
Thy gift of cold oblivion's healing balm,

I'd give my youth, my health, my life to come,
And share thy slumbers in thy ocean tomb.'

Here the poet, his soul longing for freedom from mortality, his crushed and wounded spirit hovering above the salt and restless wave, contemplates the pale and ghastly body that floats thereon, and, holding communion with it, touches in melancholy and beautiful words its isolation and oblivion. Accompanying the dead in its watery wanderings, he sees, with keen sympathy, its utter disseverance from the world it has left, and contrasts with its condition the hopeless sorrow of his own disappointed youth. He delineates, in words of singular power and felicity, this weird and lonely picture; and, as an artist and a poet, paints wildly, but beautifully, the decay of the drowned in the ocean, and of the living, through the effects of long-continued woe. Branwell had loved, indeed, however unfortunately; and the misery of his passion caused him to turn his reflections within upon himself. As with the 'Wandering Jew,' who sees in every rock, in every bush, in every cloud, without hope of alleviation from his abiding woe, the *via crucis* of his suffering Lord—every

thought of Branwell's gifted mind, every conception of his fertile brain, every aspect, to him, of ocean, earth, and sky,—was, in one way or other, instinct with his own initial and irrepressible affection. Apart, however, from the illusions respecting the lady of his heart, under which he laboured, and which drove him to madness, there was a tendency to gloom and despondency implanted in his very nature, a disposition of mind in which his sister Emily largely resembled him. To such an extent was this the case that, in her poem of 'The Philosopher,' written in the October of 1845, she not only gives expression to similar weird thoughts and desires, but one might think there had been some interchange of ideas between the two,—that, perhaps, she had read his 'Real Rest,' and wrote the following words in half-censure of its tendency. She is speaking of an enlightening spirit:

'Had I but seen his glorious eye
Once light the clouds that wilder me;
I ne'er had raised this coward cry
To cease to think, and cease to be;
I ne'er had called oblivion blest,
Nor stretching eager hands to death,

Implored to change for senseless rest
  This sentient soul, this living breath—
Oh, let me die—that power and will
  Their cruel strife may close;
And conquered good and conquering ill
  Be lost in one repose!'

It is noteworthy that Charlotte, also, in the second part of her poem 'Gilbert,' has used the incident of a corpse floating upon the waters, which is seen by the unhappy man in his vision, not, indeed, to give him the calm of oblivion, but rather, in contrast to Branwell's poem, to wake in him the pains of sorrow and remorse.

Again, on the 25th of November, 1845, Branwell wrote to Leyland. He could not free himself from the unfortunate ideas which had perverted his understanding, but on every other subject he wrote justly.

'Haworth,
'Bradford, Yorks.

'MY DEAR SIR,

'I send you the enclosed,—and I ought to tell you why I wished anything of so personal a nature to appear in print.

'I have no other way, not pregnant with

danger, of communicating with one whom I cannot help loving. Printed lines, with my usual signature, "Northangerland," could excite no suspicion—as my late unhappy employer shrank from the bare idea of my being able to write anything, and had a day's sickness after hearing that Macaulay had sent me a complimentary letter; so *he* won't know the name.

'I sent through a private channel one letter of comfort in her great and agonizing present afflictions, but I recalled it through dread of the consequences of a discovery.

'These lines have only one merit,—that of really expressing my feelings, while sailing under the Welsh mountain, when the band on board the steamer struck up, "Ye banks and braes!" God knows that, for many different reasons, those feelings were far enough from pleasure.

'I suffer very much from that mental exhaustion which arises from brooding on matters useless at present to think of,—and active employment would be my greatest cure and blessing,—for really, after hours of thoughts which business would have hushed, I have felt as if I could not live, and, if long continued, such a state will

bring on permanent affection of the heart, which is already bothered with most uneasy palpitations.

'I should like extremely to have an hour's sitting with you, and, if I had the chance, I would promise to try not to look gloomy. You said you would be at Haworth ere long, but that "ere" has doubtless changed to "ne'er;" so I must wish to get to Halifax some time to see you.

'I saw Murray's monument praised in the papers, and I trust you are getting on well with Beckwith's, as well as with your own personal statue of living flesh and blood.

'Mine, like your Theseus, has lost its hands and feet, and I fear its head also, for it can neither move, write, nor think as it once could.

'I hope I shall hear from you on John Brown's return from Halifax, whither he has gone.

'I remain, &c.,

'P. B. Brontë.'

The poem enclosed was entitled:

PENMAENMAWR.

'These winds, these clouds, this chill November storm
Bring back again thy tempest-beaten form

To eyes that look upon yon dreary sky
As late they looked on thy sublimity;
When I, more troubled than thy restless sea,
Found, in its waves, companionship with thee.
'Mid mists thou frownedst over Arvon's shore,
'Mid tears I watched thee over ocean's roar,
And thy blue front, by thousand storms laid bare,
Claimed kindred with a heart worn down by care.
No smile had'st thou, o'er smiling fields aspiring,
And none had I, from smiling fields retiring;
Blackness, 'mid sunlight, tinged thy slaty brow,
I, 'mid sweet music, looked as dark as thou;
Old Scotland's song, o'er murmuring surges borne,
Of "times departed,—never to return,"
Was echoed back in mournful tones from thee,
And found an echo, quite as sad, in me;
Waves, clouds, and shadows moved in restless change,
Around, above, and on thy rocky range,
But seldom saw that sovereign front of thine
Changes more quick than those which passed o'er mine.
And as wild winds and human hands, at length,
Have turned to scattered stones the mighty strength
Of that old fort, whose belt of boulders grey
Roman or Saxon legions held at bay;
So had, methought, the young, unshaken nerve—
That, when WILL wished, no doubt could cause to swerve,
That on its vigour ever placed reliance,
That to its sorrows sometimes bade defiance—
Now left my spirit, like thyself, old hill,
With head defenceless against human ill;

And, as thou long hast looked upon the wave
That takes, but gives not, like a churchyard grave,
I, like life's course, through ether's weary range,
Never know rest from ceaseless strife and change.

'But, PENMAENMAWR! a better fate was thine,
Through all its shades, than that which darkened mine;
No quick thoughts thrilled through thy gigantic mass
Of woe for what might be, or is, or was;
Thou hadst no memory of the glorious hour
When Britain rested on thy giant power;
Thou hadst no feeling for the verdant slope
That leant on thee as man's heart leads on hope;
The pastures, chequered o'er with cot and tree,
Though thou wert guardian, got no smile from thee;
Old ocean's wrath their charms might overwhelm,
But thou could'st still keep thy unshaken realm—
While I felt flashes of an inward feeling
As fierce as those thy craggy form revealing
In nights of blinding gleams, when deafening roar
Hurls back thy echo to old Mona's shore.
I knew a flower, whose leaves were meant to bloom
Till Death should snatch it to adorn a tomb,
Now, blanching 'neath the blight of hopeless grief,
With never blooming, and yet living leaf;
A flower on which my mind would wish to shine,
If but one beam could break from mind like mine.
I had an ear which could on accents dwell
That might as well say "perish!" as "farewell!"
An eye which saw, far off, a tender form,
Beaten, unsheltered, by affliction's storm;

An arm—a lip—that trembled to embrace
My angel's gentle breast and sorrowing face,
A mind that clung to Ouse's fertile side
While tossing—objectless—on Menai's tide!

'Oh, Soul! that draw'st yon mighty hill and me
Into communion of vague unity,
Tell me, can I obtain the stony brow
That fronts the storm, as much unbroken now
As when it once upheld the fortress proud,
Now gone, like its own morning cap of cloud?
Its breast is stone. Can I have one of steel,
To endure—inflict—defend—yet never feel?
It stood as firm when haughty Edward's word
Gave hill and dale to England's fire and sword,
As when white sails and steam-smoke tracked the sea,
And all the world breathed peace, but waves and me.

'Let me, like it, arise o'er mortal care,
All woes sustain, yet never know despair;
Unshrinking face the grief I now deplore,
And stand, through storm and shine, like moveless
PENMAENMAWR!'

These lines are shadowed, like all his other writings, with the grief that day and night oppressed him. Throughout the theme, his eager yearning for mental quiet is finely expressed; and in it he contrasts the strength and calm of the everlasting hill in its chequered history, and

in the ceaseless changes, and the lights and shadows that fall upon it, with his own wild and stormy existence; the lady, whose charms have bewildered his imagination, supplying him with a subject for sorrowful recollections. The giant hill is the mighty image with which his perturbed soul communes, and he implores for strength to enable him to rise superior to his misfortunes, and to face, like 'moveless Penmaenmawr,' the storm, adversity, and ruin that threaten him. But there was little likelihood of the lady seeing these lines.

We find Branwell, at the time, making efforts to obtain some employment that would divert him from useless brooding upon the unfortunate circumstances that destroyed his peace. Scarcely, also, was he less anxious to be away from home, for his presence there had been his greatest humiliation when his family knew of his disgrace; yet, with a method of which he was master, he appears to have kept silence there on the subject his madness made him so ready to repeat to others. However his sisters Emily and Anne might regard him, Charlotte, at least, looked upon him as one of the fallen.

She thus writes to her friend concerning him on the 4th of November, 1845: 'I hoped to be able to ask you to come to Haworth. It almost seemed as if Branwell had a chance of getting employment, and I waited to know the result of his efforts in order to say, dear ——, come and see us. But the place (a secretaryship to a railway committee) is given to another person. Branwell still remains at home; and while *he* is here, *you* shall not come. I am more confirmed in that resolution the more I see of him. I wish I could say one word to you in his favour, but I cannot. I will hold my tongue. We are all obliged to you for your kind suggestion about Leeds; but I think our school schemes are, for the present, at rest.' Again, she says on December 31st of the same year: 'You say well, in speaking of ——, that no sufferings are so awful as those brought on by dissipation; alas! I see the truth of this observation daily proved. —— and —— must have as weary and burdensome a life of it in waiting upon their unhappy brother. It seems grievous, indeed, that those who have not sinned should

suffer so largely.'[1] Charlotte also, writing to Nancy Garrs, who at times assisted at the parsonage, complained of the conduct of her brother; but, later, requested that the letter should be destroyed. Her wish was complied with.

It is, indeed, an almost impossible task to convey to the reader, in the pages of a biography, an idea which will, in an adequate degree, approach the intimate acquaintance which those who lived, saw, and spoke with its subject possessed. And, yet, how necessary is such knowledge to the right understanding of anyone's letters! But with what chance of a true insight, then, shall we read the letters of Branwell Brontë and his sister, if we have an incorrect view of his character?

Miss Robinson has confidently concluded, from certain depreciatory references to himself, in his letters to Mr. Grundy, that, at this period, 'he was manifestly, and by his own confession, too physically prostrate for any literary effort,' with how much accuracy the reader has seen

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii.

and will further see. And Mr. Wemyss Reid, with respect to the character of Mr. Brontë, adopting much of Mrs. Gaskell's view of him, and relying upon his children's letters, has produced a portrait of him to which, as he allows, 'some of those who knew him in his later years, including one who is above all others entitled to an opinion on the subject, have objected as being over-coloured.' We must not read, then, too literally all that we find in the letters. It would be folly to take word for word Charlotte's account of her father's anger when she announced to him a proposal of marriage which had been made to her, and which did not accord with his wish; or to believe that 'compassion or relenting is no more to be looked for from papa than sap from fire-wood,' when we know that he afterwards voluntarily gave way, and sacrificed his own opinion. Nor would it be right to accept any exaggerated confession of Charlotte about herself, in a literal sense. And thus it does not sound well in Mrs. Gaskell, after completing her account of the outward events of Branwell's life, to say, 'All that is to be said more about Branwell Brontë

shall be said by Charlotte herself, not by me;' and then to proceed to extract such portions of the sister's letters as condemned him, and to summarize or repress anything favourable. But Miss Robinson has gone further. She, by extracting a few censures from various letters, apart in date, and leaving out all mention of the chance of the secretaryship in the letter of November the 4th, and the words 'to him' in another, has left her reader under the impression that, after his dismissal, Branwell would not seek employment. 'Such was not his intention,' she says. But Branwell's efforts to obtain the secretaryship, to which Charlotte alludes, are sufficient evidence of a contrary disposition in him; and we shall find that he exerted himself in other directions also.

The failure of the school-keeping has likewise been duly laid to his charge, although, as we have seen, Mr. Brontë's oncoming blindness, in the first place, and the difficulty of procuring pupils at Haworth, were the causes of its failure. To the reason why no attempt was made to open a school elsewhere, I shall have further to allude.

We have been told by Mrs. Gaskell that, some months after Branwell's dismissal, he met the wife of his former employer clandestinely by appointment. 'There was,' she says, 'a strange lingering of conscience, when . . . . . he refused to consent to the elopement which she proposed.'[1] Miss Robinson, who adopts this report, thinks that the phrase 'herself and estate,' in the letter he sent to Mr. Grundy, throws quite a new light upon Mrs. Gaskell's opinion that there were any remains of conscience left in Branwell Brontë. She says he counselled 'a little longer waiting,' — that he might become possessed of the property, on the death of the lady's husband. But if this incident of the proposed elopement had actually taken place, the delay suggested by Branwell should surely be held as proof that anything positively dishonourable was repulsive to him. The lady, too, had an ample fortune of her own, of which, had she proposed an elopement, she would have informed him. But, if we consider the possible sources from which such a story as this could arise, we may surmise that Mrs. Gaskell,—who first gave it to the public, and on

[1] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii., 1st edition.

whose authority it alone remains,—obtained it, with the many other incidents she has published, from the current scandal of Haworth, —where else could she have heard it?—and when we remember that the rumours of the village, though magnified a hundred-fold, had their origin in the infatuated belief and wild statements of Branwell himself, possibly we shall not be wrong if we conclude that it had no foundation whatever in fact. Certainly there is no sufficient evidence for it. And the story is in itself inherently improbable, for it alleges that the lady had been not only regardless of her reputation, but had cast to the winds all thoughts of those pecuniary considerations which, a little later, upon the death of her husband, are stated to have prevented her from marrying in honour the supposed object of her affections.

I have, earlier in this work, spoken of a poem on one of the traditions of Lancashire, by Mr. Peters, entitled: 'Leyland's Daughter,' which is the story of a romantic elopement. Branwell, early in 1846, proposed to write a poem on Morley Hall, in the parish of Leigh, where the elopement took place in the reign of Edward VI.,

in which he also would touch upon the incident.

This tradition, and Branwell's intended work on the subject, became often a topic of conversation both at Haworth and Halifax: and, it is not improbable that, some ten years afterwards, when Mrs. Gaskell was searching at the former place for materials for her work, the story of this ancient elopement had become mixed with the stories of the village respecting Branwell and the lady of his late employer, and thus, with them, was ready for Mrs. Gaskell's hand, additions having been made as to time and place.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SISTERS' POEMS AND NOVELS.—BRANWELL'S LITERARY OCCUPATIONS.

The Sisters as Writers of Poetry—They Decide to Publish—Each begins a Novel—The Spirit under which the Work was Undertaken—'The Professor'—'Agnes Grey'—'Wuthering Heights'—Branwell's Condition—A Touching Incident—'Epistle from a Father to a Child in her Grave'—Letter with Sonnet—Publication of the Sisters' Poems.

If Branwell Brontë had devoted himself to literature under the impulse of his misfortune, his sisters were not long unoccupied ere they also entered upon its pursuit. 'One day, in the autumn of 1845,' says Charlotte, 'I accidentally lighted on a MS. volume of verse in my sister Emily's handwriting.' The elder sister was not surprised, knowing that the younger could and did write verse; but she thought these were no

common effusions. 'To my ear,' she says, 'they had also a peculiar music—wild, melancholy, and elevating. My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one on the recesses of whose mind and feelings even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed; it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication.' Charlotte Brontë here grasped, with unfailing precision, the very secret spell which we find in Emily's poetry; the strange, wild, weird voice, with which it speaks to us, spoke first of all to her, and she felt the heather-scented breath, even as we do, of the moorland air on which its music was borne. Anne also produced verses, which had 'a sweet, sincere pathos of their own;' and the three sisters, believing, after anxious deliberation, that they might get their respective productions accepted for publication in one volume, set on foot inquiries on the subject, and now adopted the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, which were afterwards to become so famous. It was not, however, to be expected that the effusions of inexperienced and unknown

writers would be of such value as to induce any publisher to take them on his own risk. Indeed, Miss Brontë says 'the great puzzle lay in the difficulty of getting answers of any kind from the publishers to whom we applied.' She wrote to Messrs. Chambers, of Edinburgh, asking advice, and received a brief and business-like reply, upon which the sisters acted, and at last made way.

On the 28th of January, 1846, Charlotte, as we have been informed, wrote to Messrs. Aylott and Jones, asking if they would publish a one-volume, octavo, of poems; if not at their own risk, on the authors' account. Messrs. Aylott and Jones did not hesitate to accept the latter proposal.

It must have been when the sisters became aware that publishers would not accept the poetry of unknown writers on any other terms, that they turned their thoughts to prose composition. Branwell, in his dire distress, had fixed his attention on the writing of a three-volume novel, principally as a refuge from mental disquiet; but his sisters, now, with very different feelings, each set to work on a one-volume tale.

It had occurred to them, we are told, that by novel-writing money was to be made. They were, in fact, influenced by precisely the view of the profit to be derived from fiction which Branwell had propounded in his remarkable letter to his friend Leyland. 'Ill-success,' says Charlotte, 'failed to crush us: the mere effort to succeed had given a wonderful zest to existence; it must be pursued. We each set to work on a prose tale: Ellis Bell produced "Wuthering Heights," Acton Bell, "Agnes Grey," and Currer Bell also wrote a narrative in one volume.'

The business-like way in which the sisters went about their novel-writing, forbids us to believe that they brooded very much on the conduct of their brother when the literary fervour was upon them; but Miss Robinson leads her readers to think that his character and failings had much to do with the tone which their works assumed. Writing under this belief, and with this intention,—as might have been expected,—she has found it necessary to paint every circumstance relating to him, and the inmates of the parsonage, in the darkest colours, and often has arrived at conclusions widely different from the

actual facts. Moreover this writer, in supporting her views, has fallen into the serious error of placing the event which completed Branwell's disappointment, and its consequences to him, four months earlier than they occurred.

The novels which the sisters wrote under the influence of these troubles do not, indeed, bear any marked traces of them. 'The Professor,' Charlotte's story, which was not published until long after, is the direct outcome of her personal experiences in Brussels, and the few shadows that one finds in it are the record of such troubles as she had there. In this book, Currer Bell describes the life of endeavour, which seemed to her the most honourable, the treading of those paths in the outer world whose pleasures and pains she had found so keen. Already, in the March of 1845, she had written to a friend telling her that she was no longer happy at Haworth, though it was her duty to remain there. 'There was a time when Haworth was a very pleasant place to me; it is not so now. I feel as if we were all buried here. I long to travel; to work; to live a life of action.' Thus 'The Professor' is the story of the work and of the life of action

for which the author herself was pining. William Crimsworth, neglected by his rich relations, cut off by his brutal brother, seeks his fortune in Brussels, and obtains a place as professor of English in a school there. He leads a life that Charlotte knows well; he is in the place she has learned to love; and he describes, with close observation, the character and the routine to which she is so well accustomed. Pelet, his master, is an original, as Paul Emanuel is, and Zoraïde Reuter is the prototype of Madame Beck. These characters are forcibly conceived, as is that of Mademoiselle Henri; but the book bears the traces of a novice's hand. Thus, how unnatural does the proposal which Crimsworth makes to Frances read to us, where, while asking her to be his wife, demanding of her what regard she has for him, he says not a word of his own devotion to her; and where, even when she grants him all he has been hoping for so long, his sole remark is, 'Very well, Frances!' But a stronger point of interest for us in the book is the spirit which moves Crimsworth in his endeavours, where he struggles with might and main, just as Charlotte herself wished to do, for a competency;

and there is the school, too, which his wife designs and establishes, the very pattern of that which was in Charlotte's own mind. It is instructive and singular that in this book we find Crimsworth suffering from the hypochondria which beset its author, and that, too, at the time when he should have been happiest.

'Man,' he says, 'is ever clogged with his mortality, and it was my mortal nature which now faltered and plained; my nerves, which jarred and gave a false sound, because the soul, of late rushing headlong to an aim, had overstrained the body's comparative weakness. A horror of great darkness fell upon me; I felt my chamber invaded by one I had known formerly, but had thought for ever departed. I was temporarily a prey to hypochondria. She had been my acquaintance, nay, my guest, once before in boyhood; I had entertained her at bed and board for a year; for that space of time I had her to myself in secret; she lay with me, she ate with me, she walked out with me, showing me nooks in woods, hollows in hills, where we could sit together, and where she could drop her drear veil over me, and so hide sky and sun,

grass and green tree; taking me entirely to her death-cold bosom, and holding me with arms of bone.' This was the phantom that visited Charlotte also. Of the effect of her brother's conduct on her I have found but two passages in 'The Professor,'—that which I have quoted respecting the youth of Victor Crimsworth earlier in this volume, and that, in Chapter xx., where William Crimsworth leaves Pelet's house lest a 'practical modern French novel' should be in process beneath its roof. It was Charlotte's design, in writing 'The Professor,' to lend it no charm of romance. Her hero was to work his way through life, and to find no sudden turn to endow him with wealth, for he was to earn every shilling he possessed, and he was not even to marry a beautiful girl or a lady of rank in the end. 'In the sequel, however,' says Charlotte, 'I find that publishers in general scarcely approved of this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical;' and for this reason, probably, the book did not find a publisher so soon as 'Agnes Grey,' and 'Wuthering Heights,' which were sent from the parsonage with it.

'Agnes Grey,' Anne Brontë's story, like 'The

Professor,' is the picture of things its author had known, painted almost as she saw them. Anne's experience as a governess had made her acquainted with certain phases of life, which she could not but reproduce. Hence Agnes Grey is thrown into the sphere of the careless and selfish family of the Bloomfields; and afterwards, with the Murrays at Horton Lodge, she sees a kind of personal character and social life which, on account of its coldness and worldliness, greatly repelled Anne Brontë, with her warm and sympathetic nature. She teaches the same lesson of the folly of *mariages de convenance*, and of the wrong of subjecting the affections, and bartering happiness for the sake of worldly position, which she afterwards dwells upon more strongly in 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.' It is in this fictitious parallel of Anne Brontë's own experience, if anywhere in her writings, that we might expect to find some reflection of the recent history of her brother's fall. Mr. Reid has asserted that this formed the dark turning-point in her life, for 'living under the same roof with him when he went astray,' she 'was compelled to be a closer and more constant witness of his sins

and his sufferings than either Charlotte or Emily.' Her letters home, it has been stated, conveyed the news of her dark forebodings. But, all the same, the story she wrote, almost under the shadow of her brother's disgrace, is the simple, straightforward, humorous narrative of the gentle and pious Anne Brontë, revealing not so much as a suspicion of vice or thought of evil; and, in this respect, it presents a contrast to her second work. There is evidence that when the sisters wrote their novels they had already attributed monomania to Branwell, and could thus explain his history for themselves. It was not in the nature of 'Agnes Grey' to be successful as a novel, but we find in it that Anne possessed a faculty which scarcely appears in Charlotte's writings,—that of humour. Look, for instance, at the way in which she sketches so forcibly, and with such droll perception, the character of the youthful Bloomfields, and, afterwards, of Miss Matilda Murray, with her equine propensities and masculine tastes.

'Wuthering Heights,' the work which Emily Brontë sent from the parsonage at the same time, incomparably finer in its powers than either 'The Professor' or 'Agnes Grey,' is a dramatic

story of passion and tragic energy that astonished the world,—and with which it has been said Branwell's life in those days had much concern. Inferentially, it is contended that, without the darkening effect on her understanding of Branwell's misfortunes, without the neighbourhood of the 'brother of set purpose drinking himself to death out of furious thwarted passion for a mistress he might not marry,' Emily Brontë could not have conceived it. It will, then, perhaps be better to defer the study of Emily's production till something more has been said of the period in which it was written; and until some new light has been thrown upon Branwell's character and career, and upon the anachronistic improprieties of previous writers.

Mrs. Gaskell passes over the period in which the sisters betook themselves to novel writing with little comment. But she keeps in remembrance the presence of Branwell while their literary labours continued,—'the black shadow of remorse lying over one in their home.' What it was that the biographer of Charlotte supposed stung Branwell's conscience is well known; but, if there had been this cause for it in one of a

naturally remorseful disposition, as his was, we must have met with some expression of it in his letters or poems, for

> 'The Mind, that broods o'er guilty woes,
> Is like the Scorpion girt by fire.'

Yet, perhaps, one of the most significant points to be observed in Branwell's writings, and in studying his conduct, is the absence of any such remorse. He encouraged himself—after the first shock of his disappointment—with the hope that time would bring him the happiness he wished; and, as some believe, with good and sufficient reason. He was unhappy when he thought of the supposed ill-health and sufferings of the lady.

It is noteworthy that something inconsequent, in putting down Branwell's conduct entirely to remorse in this way, was the feature of Mrs. Gaskell's work, to which so great an analyzer of motives as George Eliot, as shown by her letters published quite recently, took exception, and regretted.[1]

[1] 'George Eliot's Life, as related in her Letters and Journals,' arranged and edited by her husband, J. W. Cross, 1885, vol i., p. 441.

If we believe Branwell to have been subject to hallucination, we may then, perhaps, gain an idea of the true cause of the wretchedness he endured when he fell back on his own reflections. His life had been one of severe disappointment. Those early aims in art, for which he had spent so much preparation, and from which he hoped so much, had fallen away before him; his first efforts as usher and tutor had come to nothing; then followed the lapse which ended his stay with the railway company; and, lastly, the infatuation which had seized him in his late employment, with its vision of future opulence, and rest from all former change and trouble, ending in dismissal, distraction, and disgrace. All these things, rushing back upon his mind in moments of reflection, were more than he could bear, and he sought, in various ways, some honourable to him, to divert himself from the subject, but sometimes in a manner that gave cause for complaint at home, and resulted in moodiness and irritability of temper. On the other hand, he seems to have felt himself aggrieved by a want of sympathy on the part of his family in sufferings they did not comprehend.

Mr. George Searle Phillips, with whom Branwell became acquainted at Bradford, and who visited him at Haworth, says that he complained sometimes of the way in which he was treated at home; and, as an instance, relates the following:

'One of the Sunday-school girls, in whom he and all his house took much interest, fell very sick, and they were afraid she would not live. "I went to see the poor little thing," he said; "sat with her half-an-hour, and read a psalm to her, and a hymn at her request. I felt very like praying with her too," he added, his voice trembling with emotion; "but, you see, I was not good enough. How dare I pray for another, who had almost forgotten how to pray for myself! I came away with a heavy heart, for I felt sure she would die, and went straight home, where I fell into melancholy musings. I wanted somebody to cheer me. I often do, but no kind word finds its way even to my ears, much less to my heart. Charlotte observed my depression, and asked what ailed me. So I told her. She looked at me with a look I shall never forget—if I live to be a hundred years old—

which I never shall. It was not like her at all. It wounded me as if some one had struck me a blow in the mouth. It involved ever so many things in it. It was a dubious look. It ran over me, questioning, and examining, as if I had been a wild beast. It said, 'Did my ears deceive me, or did I hear aright?' And then came the painful, baffled expression, which was worse than all. It said, 'I wonder if that's true?' But, as she left the room, she seemed to accuse herself of having wronged me, and smiled kindly upon me, and said, 'She is my little scholar, and I will go and see her.' I replied not a word. I was too much cut up. When she was gone, I came over here to the 'Black Bull,' and made a note of it in sheer disgust and desperation. Why could they not give me some credit when I was trying to be good?" '[1]

At the beginning of March, Charlotte returned from a visit to a friend, and we hear that she found it very forced work to address her brother when she went into the room where he was; but he took no notice, and made no reply; he was stupefied; she had heard that he had got a

[1] 'The Mirror,' 1872.

sovereign while she was away, on pretence of paying a pressing debt, and had changed it, at a public-house, with the expected result.

Again Charlotte says, on March 31st, 1846: 'I am thankful papa continues pretty well, though often made very miserable by Branwell's wretched conduct. *There*—there is no change but for the worse.'

At this time Branwell wrote the following beautiful ode, somewhat incomplete in its expression, yet characteristic of his genius, which seems to have been inspired by the outcast feelings of which he spoke to Mr. Phillips, and to contain some reproach to those who thought him deficient in natural affection. It bears date April 3rd, 1846:

EPISTLE FROM A FATHER TO A CHILD IN HER GRAVE.

'From Earth,—whose life-reviving April showers
Hide withered grass 'neath Springtide's herald flowers,
And give, in each soft wind that drives her rain,
Promise of fields and forests rich again,—
I write to thee, the aspect of whose face
Can never change with altered time or place;
Whose eyes could look on India's fiercest wars
Less shrinking than the boldest son of Mars;

Whose lips, more firm that Stoic's long ago,
Would neither smile with joy nor blanch with woe;
Whose limbs could sufferings far more firmly bear
Than mightiest heroes in the storms of war;
Whose frame, nor wishes good, nor shrinks from ill,
Nor feels distraction's throb, nor pleasure's thrill.

'I write to thee what thou wilt never read,
For heed me thou *wilt not*, howe'er may bleed
The heart that many think a worthless stone,
But which oft aches for some belovéd one;
Nor, if that life, mysterious, from on high,
Once more gave feeling to thy stony eye,
Could'st thou thy father know, or feel that he
Gave life and lineaments and thoughts to thee;
For when thou died'st, thy day was in its dawn,
And night still struggled with Life's opening morn;
The twilight star of childhood, thy young days
Alone illumined, with its twinkling rays,
So sweet, yet feeble, given from those dusk skies,
Whose kindling, coming noontide prophesies,
But tells us not that Summer's noon can shroud
Our sunshine with a veil of thundercloud.

'If, when thou freely gave the life, that ne'er
To thee had given either hope or fear,
But quietly had shone; nor asked if joy
Thy future course should cheer, or grief annoy;

'If then thoud'st seen, upon a summer sea,
One, once in features, as in blood, like thee,

On skies of azure blue and waters green,
Melting to mist amid the summer sheen,
In trouble gazing—ever hesitating
'Twixt miseries each hour new dread creating,
And joys—whate'er they cost—still doubly dear,
Those "troubled pleasures soon chastised by fear;"
If thou *had'st* seen him, thou would'st ne'er believe
That thou had'st yet known what it was to live!

'Thine eyes could only see thy mother's breast;
Thy feelings only wished on that to rest;
That was thy world;—thy food and sleep it gave,
And slight the change 'twixt it and childhood's grave.
Thou saw'st this world like one who, prone, reposes,
Upon a plain, and in a bed of roses,
With nought in sight save marbled skies above,
Nought heard but breezes whispering in the grove:
I—thy life's source—was like a wanderer breasting
Keen mountain winds, and on a summit resting,
Whose rough rocks rose above the grassy mead,
With sleet and north winds howling overhead,
And Nature, like a map, beneath him spread;
Far winding river, tree, and tower, and town,
Shadow and sunlight, 'neath his gaze marked down
By that mysterious hand which graves the plan
Of that drear country called "The Life of Man."

'If seen, men's eyes would loathing shrink from thee,
And turn, perhaps, with no disgust to me;
Yet thou had'st beauty, innocence, and smiles,
And now hast rest from this world's woes and wiles,

While I have restlessness and worrying care,
So sure, thy lot is brighter, happier far.

'So let it be; and though thy ears may never
Hear these lines read beyond Death's darksome river,
Not vainly from the borders of despair
May rise a sound of joy that thou art freed from care!'

On the 6th of April of this year, Charlotte wrote to Messrs. Aylott & Jones, informing them that 'the Messrs. Bell' were preparing for the press a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales, which might be published either together, as a work of three volumes of the ordinary novel size, or separately, as single volumes. It was not their intention to publish these at their own expense, and they wished to know if Messrs. Aylott would be likely to undertake the work, if approved.

The novels must have been well on towards completion before the sisters ventured on these inquiries. The firm thus addressed kindly offered advice, of which Charlotte glady availed herself to ask some questions. These were respecting the difficulty which unknown authors find in obtaining assistance from publishers; and Charlotte has indeed informed us that the

three tales were going about among them 'for the space of a year and a half.' But 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey' at last found acceptance in the early summer of 1847.

A friendly compact had been made between Branwell and Leyland that the latter should model a medallion of his friend, and that Branwell should write the poem 'Morley Hall,'—to which I have had occasion above to allude—a subject in which the sculptor was much interested. Shortly after his sister made the inquiries from Messrs. Aylott, Branwell visited Halifax to sit for his medallion; and, on the 28th of April, he wrote the following letter to his friend:—

'Haworth, Bradford,
'Yorks.

'MY DEAR SIR,

'As I am anxious—though my return for your kindness will be like giving a sixpence for a sovereign lent—to do my best in my intended lines on Morley, I want answers to the following questions . . . . . If I learn these facts, I'll do my best, but in all I try to

write I desire to stick to probabilities and local characteristics.

'I cannot, without a smile at myself, think of my stay for three days in Halifax on a business which need not have occupied three hours; but, in truth, when I fall back *on* myself, I suffer so much wretchedness that I cannot withstand any temptation to get *out* of myself—and for that reason, I am prosecuting enquiries about situations suitable to me, whereby I could have a voyage abroad. The quietude of home, and the inability to make my family aware of the nature of most of my sufferings, makes me write:

'Home thoughts are not with me,
Bright, as of yore;
Joys are forgot by me,
Taught to deplore!
My home has taken rest
In an afflicted breast,
Which I have often pressed,
But may no more.

'Troubles never come alone—and I have some little troubles astride the shoulders of the big one.

'Literary exertion would seem a resource; but

the depression attendant on it, and the almost hopelessness of bursting through the barriers of literary circles, and getting a hearing among publishers, make me disheartened and indifferent, for I cannot write what would be thrown unread into a library fire. Otherwise, I have the materials for a respectably sized volume, and, if I were in London personally, I might, perhaps, try —— ——, a patronizer of the sons of rhyme; though I daresay the poor man often smarts for his liberality in publishing hideous trash. As I know that, while here, I might send a manuscript to London, and say good-bye to it, I feel it folly to feed the flames of a printer's fire. So much for egotism!

'I enclose a horribly ill-drawn daub done to while away the time this morning. I meant it to represent a very rough figure in stone.

'When all our cheerful hours seem gone for ever,
All lost that caused the body or the mind
To nourish love or friendship for our kind,
And Charon's boat, prepared, o'er Lethe's river
Our souls to waft, and all our thoughts to sever
From what was once life's Light; still there may be
Some well-loved bosom to whose pillow we
Could heartily our utter self deliver;

And if, toward her grave—Death's dreary road—
Our Darling's feet should tread, each step by her
Would draw our own steps to the same abode,
And make a festival of sepulture;
For what gave joy, and joy to us had owed,
Should death affright us from, when he would her restore?

'Yours most sincerely,

'P. B. BRONTË.'

The sketch, referred to in this letter, is in Indian-ink, and is of a female figure, with clasped hands, streaming hair, and averted face. We need not entertain a doubt as to whom it is intended to represent. It is inscribed, in Spanish, 'Nuestra Señora de la Pena'—Our Lady of Grief—which also appears on a headstone in the sketch.

The sonnet, which concludes this letter to Leyland, is beautiful as it is sad, and not only possesses the musical cadences, and completeness of theme, so essential in this mode of expression, but exhibits the high culture of Branwell's mind, and the direction in which the irrepressible emotions of his heart are moved.

Branwell, in this communication, makes no further mention of his novel. Yet the experience

of his sisters with their poems had only confirmed the judgment he expressed six months before, that no pecuniary advantage was to be obtained by publishing verse. The sisters had expended, on their little volume, over thirty pounds; but they valued it rightly as an effort to succeed. It was issued from the press early in May.

Charlotte had conducted the negotiations with the publishers in a very business-like way. She had directed them as to the copies to be sent for review, and as to the advertisements, on which she wished to expend little. The book appeared, and the world took little note of it: it was scarcely mentioned anywhere; but the sisters at Haworth waited patiently, and they were not dismayed that they waited in vain; for they had new-born hope in their other literary venture of the three prose stories. 'The book,' says Charlotte of the Poems, 'was printed: it is scarcely known, and all of it that merits to be known are the poems of Ellis Bell. The fixed conviction I held, and hold, of the worth of these poems has not indeed received the confirmation of much favourable criticism; but I must retain it notwithstanding.'

In his letter Branwell expresses himself as still anxious for employment; and wise in the direction in which he seeks it. A total change of scene and circumstance would have been, at this time, his best cure and greatest blessing. Unhappily, he failed in the attempt; and we find him again writing to Mr. Grundy, inquiring for some kind of occupation.

CHAPTER VIII.

DESPONDENCY.—BRANWELL'S LETTERS.

Death of Branwell's late Employer—Branwell's Disappointment—His Letters—His Delusion—Leyland's Medallion of Him—Mr. Brontë's Blindness—Branwell's Statement to Mr. Grundy in Reference to 'Wuthering Heights'—The Sisters Relinquish the Intention of Opening a School.

An event occurred, in the early summer of 1846, which plunged Branwell into a despair, wilder, and more distracting than the one from which he had partially recovered. This resulted from the death of his late employer. No doubt, during the interval which had elapsed between his dismissal from his tutorship, and the event last named, he had encouraged himself, it might be unconsciously for the most part, with the hope that, on the death of her husband,

the lady on whom he doted would marry him. In this frame of mind, when his illusion was intensified by the clearance of the path before him, and his self-control unbridled, it may not be a subject of wonder, if he became troublesome to the inmates of the dwelling afflicted by death.

The following story, with variations, has been told as having reference to some actual or intended act of indiscretion of Branwell's at the time. It has been said that, at this juncture, a messenger was sent over to Haworth by Mrs. ——, forbidding Branwell 'ever to see her again, as, if he did, she would forfeit her fortune.'[1] It will be seen shortly that no such provision was made in her husband's will, and that the fortune she had secured to her could not be forfeited by any such act of Branwell's. The whole story, therefore, to which Mrs. Gaskell and Miss Robinson have devoted so much space may well be discredited. But Mrs. Gaskell says absolutely that Mrs. —— 'despatched *a* servant in hot haste to Haworth. He stopped at the "Black Bull," and a messenger was sent up to the par-

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii., 1st. edit.

sonage for Branwell. He came down, &c.'[1] Miss Robinson, twenty-five years later, amplifies the story. She says: '*two* men came riding to the village post haste. They sent for Branwell, and when he arrived, in a great state of excitement, one of the riders dismounted and went with him into the "Black Bull,"'[2] Without inquiring into Branwell's excitement, or into the variations in the two accounts—for there is but one point in the story on which the two authors are perfectly agreed, *viz.*, that Branwell, on the occasion, 'bleated like a calf!'—there can be little doubt that this case, on such evidence, could not get upon its legs before any country jury impanelled to try petty causes. But Branwell himself, in his letter to Mr. Grundy, given below, says the coachman *came* to *see* him, not that the lady *sent* him; and we may justly infer —if ever he came at all—that he come on his own account, having been personally acquainted with Branwell when he was tutor at ——. But, can it be believed that, supposing Mrs. —— to have been enamoured of Branwell, as assert-

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii., 1st. edit.
[2] Robinson's 'Emily Brontë,' p. 145.

ed, she could find no other confidant than her 'coachman,' as a means of communicating her sorrows and lamentations to the distracted object of her devotion? There is, in this story, the inconsistency of madness. And it must be borne in mind that the other stories, relating to Branwell at the time of his tutorship at ——, which appear to have so much interested the biographers of Charlotte and Emily, have their paternity at Haworth, and are not the more trustworthy on that account.

I regret to trouble the reader still further with the errors of fact, and the exaggerated statements into which Mrs. Gaskell has fallen respecting this event. She says of Mrs. ——: '*Her husband had made a will, in which what property he left her was bequeathed solely on the condition that she should never see Branwell Brontë again.*'[1] (The Italics are my own.) Mrs. Gaskell's postulations concerning this will are quite as erroneous as that she made in reference to Miss Branwell's, so far as it related to her nephew. Indeed, like her other allegations respecting this most painful epoch of Branwell's life, she de-

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii., 1st edit.

rived the information on which they were based, more from hearsay than from respectable or documentary evidence. It is clear she never saw the wills about which she speaks with so much assurance.

Mrs. ——, by virtue of an indenture and a certain marriage settlement, was put into possession of an income that would, after her husband's death, have enabled her to live for the term of her life with Branwell in comparative plenty. To his wife, Mr. ——, in addition to this, left the interest arising from his real and personal estate. She was also principal trustee, executor, and guardian of his children. Moreover, he enjoined upon her co-trustees always to regard the wishes and interests of his wife, and to do nothing without consulting her about the administering of his affairs. But all this—and it is quite usual—was to continue only during her widowhood; and this common arrangement, let it be borne in mind, was no more directed against Branwell than anyone else. What then, it may well be asked, becomes of Mrs. Gaskell's assertion that the property left to Mrs. —— was bequeathed solely on the con-

dition that 'she should never see Branwell Brontë again'? Whatever Mrs. Gaskell and her followers may have asserted respecting Mr. ——'s will, it was made without the slightest reference to Branwell, who himself misconceived its character, and whose very existence is unknown to it, its provisions being made without the most distant allusion to the affair that worried the unfortunate tutor day and night.

If the widow's love for Branwell had not been a mere figment of his wounded humanity, but the real affection which he fervently believed it to be, she had now the opportunity, with a sufficient income for the residue of her days, of enjoying with him an honourable and peaceful life. But the affection that makes sacrifices light, where they present themselves, was not there to call for them on behalf of Branwell, even had they now been needed. Moreover, there is no evidence worth the name that Mrs. —— ever committed the acts in relation to him attributed to her; on the contrary, the sincere affection and touching reliance on his wife, manifested throughout his will, is proof enough that her husband had had no cause to

call her fidelity in question. It is, indeed, true that, while the lady's reputation was unblemished in the wide circle of her friends in the neighbourhood of her residence, she was being traduced, misrepresented, and belied at Haworth and its vicinity alone. This was all known to Charlotte Brontë when she wrote her poem of 'Preference.'

The state of Branwell's mind, and the extent of his hallucinations under their last phase, may be observed in the following letters, written in the month of June, 1846, the first being to Mr. Grundy.[1]

'Haworth, Bradford,
'York.

'DEAR SIR,

'I must again trouble you with—' (Here comes another prayer for employment, with, at the same time, a confession that his health alone renders the wish all but hopeless.) Subsequently he says, 'The gentleman with whom I have been is dead. His property is left in trust for the family, provided I do not see the widow;

[1] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 89.

and if I do, it reverts to the executing trustees, with ruin to her. She is now distracted with sorrows and agonies; and the statement of her case, as given by her coachman, who has come to see me at Haworth, fills me with inexpressible grief. Her mind is distracted to the verge of insanity, and mine is so wearied that I wish I were in my grave.

'Yours very sincerely,

'P. B. BRONTË.'

He also wrote to Leyland in great distraction.

'I should have sent you "Morley Hall" ere now, but I am unable to finish it at present, from agony to which the grave would be far preferable. Mr. —— is *dead*, and he has left his widow in a dreadful state of health . . . . . Through the will, she is left quite powerless. The executing trustees' (the principal one of whom, as we have seen, was the very lady whose hopeless love for him he was deploring) 'detest me, and one declares that, if he sees me, he will shoot me.

'These things I do not care about, but I do

care for the life of the one who suffers even more than I do . . . . . .

'You, though not much older than myself, have known life. I now know it, with a vengeance—for four nights I have not slept—for three days I have not tasted food—and, when I think of the state of her I love best on earth, I could wish that my head was as cold and stupid as the medallion which lies in your studio.

'I write very egotistically, but it is because my mind is crowded with one set of thoughts, and I long for one sentence from a friend.

'What shall I *do?* I know not—I am too hard to die, and too wretched to live. My wretchedness is not about castles in the air, but about stern realities; my hardihood lies in bodily vigour; but, dear sir, my mind sees only a dreary future, which I as little wish to enter on as could a martyr to be bound to a stake.

'I sincerely trust that you are quite well, and hope that this wretched scrawl will not make me appear to you a worthless fool, or a thorough bore.

'Believe me, yours most sincerely,

'P. B. BRONTË.'

With this letter was enclosed a pen-and-ink sketch of Branwell bound to the stake, his wrists chained together, and surrounded by flames and smoke. The rigidity of the muscles, the fixed expression of the face, and the manifest beginning of pain are well portrayed. Underneath the drawing, in a constrained hand, is written, 'Myself.'

Again he writes to Leyland a letter in which he dwells on his unavailing grief, and vividly points out its effects upon him. He says, alluding to the lady of his distracted thoughts, 'Well, my dear sir, I have got my finishing stroke at last, and I feel stunned into marble by the blow.

'I have this morning received a long, kind, and faithful letter from the medical gentleman who attended —— in his last illness, and who has since had an interview with one whom I can never forget.

'He knows me *well*, and pities my case most sincerely . . . . . It's hard work for me, dear sir; I would bear it, but my health is so bad that the body seems as if it could not bear the mental shock . . . . My appetite is lost, my

nights are dreadful, and having nothing to do makes me dwell on past scenes,—on her own self—her own voice—her person—her thoughts—till I could be glad if God would take me. In the next world I could not be worse than I am in this.'

On June the 17th, Charlotte writes:

'Branwell declares that he neither can nor will do anything for himself; good situations have been offered him, for which, by a fortnight's work, he might have qualified himself, but he will do nothing except drink and make us all wretched.'[1]

It would seem that the sisters were unaware of the depth of his present misery, and in part misunderstood the disturbed condition of their brother's mind at this juncture. But Branwell, although suffering great mental prostration under the infliction of any sudden and unexpected disappointment, was possessed of considerable recuperative power; and, after a period of brooding melancholy over his woes, he appeared to take renewed interest in the events that were passing around him. This

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiv.

seems to have been the case even under his late circumstances; there was, in the depth of his own heart, a woe from which he endeavoured to escape by engaging in the pursuits and pleasures of his friends.

On the 3rd of July, having, to all appearance, somewhat recovered from this disappointment, Branwell wrote to his friend the sculptor:

'DEAR SIR,

'John Brown told me that you had a relievo of my very wretched self, framed in your studio.

'If it be a *duplicate*, I should like the carrier to bring it to Haworth; not that I care a fig for it, save from regard for its maker,—but my sisters ask me to try to obtain it; and I write in obedience to them.

'I earnestly trust that you are heartier than I am, and I promise to send you "Morley Hall" as soon as dreary days and nights will give me leave to do so.

'Believe me,

'Yours most sincerely,

'P. B. BRONTË.'

This was a life-size medallion of him, head and shoulders, which Leyland had modelled. The work was in very high relief, and the likeness was perfect. It was inserted in a deep oval recess, lined with crimson velvet, and this was fixed in a massive oak frame, glazed. It projected, when hung up in the drawing-room of the parsonage at Haworth, some eight inches from the wall; this was the one Mrs. Gaskell saw, of which she says:—'I have seen Branwell's profile; it is what would be generally esteemed very handsome; the forehead is massive, the eye well set, and the expression of it fine and intellectual; the nose, too, is good; but there are coarse lines about the mouth, and the lips, though of handsome shape, are loose and thick, indicating self-indulgence, while the slightly retreating chin conveys an idea of weakness of will.'[1] Mrs. Gaskell had only an imperfect view of the work she describes, for it was hung on the wall directly *opposite* to the windows, so that it was destitute of any side-light.

Again Branwell writes to Leyland, on the

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. ix.

16th of July, now more himself, and anxious to see his friends:

'I enclose the accompanying bill to tempt you to Haworth next Monday . . . .

'For myself, after a fit of horror inexpressible, and violent palpitation of the heart, I have taken care of myself bodily, but to what good? The best health will not kill *acute*, and *not ideal*, mental agony.

'Cheerful company does me good till some bitter truth blazes through my brain, and then the present of a bullet would be received with thanks.

'I wish I could flee to writing as a refuge, but I cannot; and, as to *slumber*, my mind, whether awake or asleep, has been in incessant action for seven weeks.'

Branwell wrote also to Mr. Grundy.[1]

'Since I saw Mr. George Gooch, I have suffered much from the accounts of the declining health of her whom I must love most in the world, and who, for my fault, suffers sorrows which surely were never her due. My father,

[1] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 89.

too, is now quite blind, and from such causes literary pursuits have become matters I have no heart to wield. If I could see you it would be a sincere pleasure, but . . . . Perhaps your memory of me may be dimmed, for you have known little in me worth remembering; but I still think often with pleasure of yourself, though so different from me in head and mind.'

'I invited him,' says Mr. Grundy, 'to come to me at the Devonshire Hotel, Skipton, a distance of some seventeen miles, and in reply received the last letter he ever wrote.' Branwell says,

'If I have strength enough for the journey, and the weather be tolerable, I shall feel happy in visiting you at the Devonshire on Friday, the 31st of this month. The sight of a face I have been accustomed to see and like when I was happier and stronger, now proves my best medicine.'

Mr. Grundy, supposing these letters to have been written in the year 1848, is in error in stating this to have been the last Branwell ever wrote. The Friday Branwell mentions must have been the one that fell on the 31st of July,

1846. About the close of that month, Charlotte and Emily went to Manchester to consult Mr. Wilson, the oculist, who, later, removed the cataract from Mr. Brontë's eyes. Under these circumstances, Branwell failed in his intended journey to Skipton.

The cataract had slowly increased as the summer advanced, till at last Mr. Brontë was quite blind. This gradual disappearance from his vision of the things he knew had necessarily a very depressing effect upon him. The thought would sometimes come to him that, if his sight were permanently lost, he would be nothing in his parish; but he supported himself, for the most part, under his affliction with his accustomed stoicism of endurance. His great trouble was that, when his sight became so dim that he could barely recognize his children's faces, and when he was debarred from using his eyes in reading, he was shut off from the solace of his books, and from the sources—the periodical press—of his knowledge of the current affairs of the outside world, wherein he took such intense interest. He was, then, left dependent on the information of others, or on his children, who

read to him in such time as they could spare from literary and household occupations. Yet there was hope—hope of an ultimate restoration of sight, and Mr. Brontë was still able to preach, even when he could not see those to whom he spoke. It was remarked that even then his sermons occupied exactly half-an-hour in delivery. This was the length of time he, with his ready use of words, had always found sufficient, and he did not exceed it now.

Every inquiry had been made from private friends that might throw light upon the chances of success in any possible operation, and it was in view of this object that the sisters visited Manchester. There they met with Mr. Wilson, who was, however, unable to say positively from description whether the eyes were ready for an operation or not. He proposed to extract the cataract, and it was accordingly arranged that Mr. Brontë should meet him.

Charlotte took her father to Manchester on the 16th of August, and, writing a few days later, she says to her friend, 'I just scribble a line to you to let you know where I am, in order that you may write to me here, for it seems to me

that a letter from you would relieve me from the feeling of strangeness I have in this big town. Papa and I came here on Wednesday; we saw Mr. Wilson, the oculist, the same day; he pronounced papa's eyes quite ready for an operation, and has fixed next Monday for the performance of it. Think of us on that day! We got into our lodgings yesterday. I think we shall be comfortable; at least, our rooms are very good . . . . Mr. Wilson says we shall have to stay here for a month at least. I wonder how Emily and Anne will get on at home with Branwell. They, too, will have their troubles. What would I not give to have you here! One is forced, step by step, to get experience in the world; but the learning is so disagreeable. One cheerful feature in the business is that Mr. Wilson thinks most favourably of the case.'

Charlotte's fears respecting her brother happily proved to be unfounded; he was himself anxious about his father's recovery; and, on her return, Charlotte, says Mrs. Gaskell, expressed herself thankful for the good ensured, and the evil spared during her absence.

From Charlotte's next letter we learn that the

operation was over. 'Mr. Wilson performed it; two other surgeons assisted. Mr. Wilson says he considers it quite successful; but papa cannot yet see anything. The affair lasted precisely a quarter-of-an-hour; it was not the simple operation of couching, Mr. C. described, but the more complicated one of extracting the cataract. Mr. Wilson entirely disapproves of couching. Papa displayed extraordinary patience and firmness; the surgeons seemed surprised. I was in the room all the time, as it was his wish that I should be there; of course, I neither spoke nor moved till the thing was done, and then I felt that the less I said, either to papa or the surgeons, the better. Papa is now confined to his bed in a dark room, and is not to be stirred for four days; he is to speak and be spoken to as little as possible.' No inflammation ensued, yet the greatest care, perfect quiet, and utter privation of light were still necessary to complete the success of the operation; and Mr. Brontë remained in his darkened room with his eyes bandaged. Charlotte thus speaks of her father under these trying circumstances. 'He is very patient, but, of course, depressed and weary. He was allowed

to try his sight for the first time yesterday. He could see dimly. Mr. Wilson seemed perfectly satisfied, and said all was right. I have had bad nights from the toothache since I came to Manchester.' But, when the danger was over, daily progress was made, and Mr. Brontë and his helpful daughter were able to return to Haworth at the end of September, when he was fast regaining his sight.

It was probably during the six weeks when Mr. Brontë and Charlotte were absent in Manchester that Mr. Grundy resolved to visit Branwell. He says: 'As he never came to see me, I shortly made up my mind to visit him at Haworth, and was shocked at the wrecked and wretched appearance he presented. Yet he still craved for an appointment of any kind, in order that he might try the excitement of change; of course uselessly,' [1]

It must, it seems, have been on this occasion, in the course of conversation at the parsonage, that Branwell made a statement respecting his novel, to Mr. Grundy, which has acquired con-

[1] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 90.

siderable interest. I give it in the words in which Mr. Grundy recalls the incident. 'Patrick Brontë declared to me, and what his sister said bore out the assertion, that he wrote a great portion of "Wuthering Heights" himself.' It should be remembered, in connection with this occurrence, that, when Mr. Grundy talked with Branwell and Emily at Haworth, the three novels which the sisters had completed a few months before, had met only with repeated rejection, and, perhaps, they felt little confidence in the ultimate publication of them. 'The Professor,' indeed, had come back to Charlotte's hands, curtly rejected, on the very day of the operation. Doubtful of ever finding a publisher willing to take this tale, or, at any rate, undaunted, she had commenced, while her father was confined to his darkened room at Manchester, the three-volume story which was afterwards to become famous as 'Jane Eyre;' Anne, too, since she had finished 'Agnes Grey,' had been busily writing 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' also meant to be a three-volume story. So absorbed had the sisters become in novel writing, that a suggestion made by a friend, at this period, of a suitable place for

opening a school, met only with an evasive answer.

'Leave home!' exclaims Charlotte, in her reply. 'I shall neither be able to find place nor employment; perhaps, too, I shall be quite past the prime of life, my faculties will be rusted, and my few acquirements in a great measure forgotten. These ideas sting me keenly sometimes; but, whenever I consult my conscience, it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home, and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release. I could hardly expect success if I were to err against such warnings. I should like to hear from you again soon. Bring —— to the point, and make him give you a clear, not a vague, account of what pupils he really could promise; people often think they can do great things in that way till they have tried; but getting pupils is unlike getting any other sort of goods.'

CHAPTER IX.

BRANWELL'S LETTERS AND LAST INTERVIEW WITH MR. GRUNDY.

Branwell's Sardonic Humour—Mr. Grundy's Visit to him at Haworth—Errors regarding the Period of it—Tragic Description—Probable Ruse of Branwell—Correspondence between him and Mr. Grundy ceases—Writes to Leyland—A Plaintive Verse—Another Letter.

BRANWELL, having shared the family anxiety, as the time drew near for the operation which restored his father's sight, experienced a sense of deep relief when all went well; moreover, the keenness of his disappointment had had time to soften, and now a grim and sardonic humour began to characterize his proceedings and his correspondence. In this frame of mind he wrote to Leyland, early in October, 1846,

a letter illustrated by some of his most spirited pen-and-ink sketches, in black and outline. It was headed by a drawing of John Brown, who had been engaged in lettering a monument, and who was represented under two different aspects. These are in one sketch, divided in the middle by a pole, on which is placed a skull. In the first compartment, the sexton is exhibited in a state of glorious exultation, kicking over the table and stools, while the chair he occupies is falling backwards. He holds a tumbler in his right hand, and swears, in his Yorkshire dialect, that he is 'King and a hauf!' under this, the word 'PARADISE' is inscribed. The second tableau represents John Brown commencing his work. On a table-tomb, the sexton's maul and chisels are placed. Being in uncertainty as to how, or where, to begin, he exclaims, 'Whativver mun I do?' In the corner, is a drawing of the western elevation of Haworth Church, and, near to Brown, a head-stone, with skull and cross-bones, inscribed, 'Here lieth the Poor.' Underneath the subject is the word 'PURGATORY.' The following is the letter:

'MY DEAR SIR,

'Mr. John Brown wishes me to tell you that, if, by return of post, you can tell him the nature of his intended work, and the time it will probably occupy in execution, either himself or his brother, or both, will wait on you *early* next week.

'He has only delayed answering your communication from his unavoidable absence in a pilgrimage from Rochdale-on-the-Rhine to the Land of Ham, and from thence to Gehenna, Tophet, Golgotha, Erebus, the Styx, and to the place he now occupies, called Tartarus, where he, along with Sisyphus, Tantalus, Theseus, and Ixion, lodge and board together.

'However, I hope that, when he meets you, he will join the company of Moses, Elias, and the prophets, "singing psalms, sitting on a wet cloud," as an acquaintance of mine described the occupation of the Blest.

'"Morley Hall" is in the eighth month of her pregnancy, and expects ere long to be delivered of a fine thumping boy, whom his father means to christen *Homer*, at least, though the mother

suggests that "Poetaster" would be more suitable; but that sounds too aristocratic.

'Is the medallion cracked that Thorwaldsen executed of AUGUSTUS CÆSAR?' To this question is appended a drawing of a coin, about the size of an ordinary penny, with the head of Branwell—an excellent likeness—around which the name of the emperor is placed. He continues:

'I wish I could see you; and, as Haworth fair is held on Monday after the ensuing one, your presence there would gratify one of the FALLEN.' Here he represents himself as plunging head foremost into a gulf.

'In my own register of transactions during my nights and days, I find no matter worthy of extraction for your perusal. All is yet with me clouds and darkness. I hope you have, at least, blue sky and sunshine.

'Constant and unavoidable depression of mind and body sadly shackle me in even trying to go on with any mental effort, which might rescue me from the fate of a dry toast, soaked six hours in a glass of cold water, and in-

tended to be given to an old maid's squeamish cat.'

Here is a sketch of the cat, distracted between a tumbler on each side held by an attenuated hand.

'Is there really such a thing as the *Risus Sardonicus*—the sardonic laugh? Did a man ever laugh the morning he was to be hanged?'

The tail-piece to this letter is a drawing of a gallows, a hand holding forth the halter to the culprit, who is John Brown, and an excellent portrait, grinning at the rope that is to terminate his existence!

Mr. Grundy—'very soon'—visited Haworth again. But I must premise, to the account of his visit which Mr. Grundy has published, some observations respecting the period at which it occurred. Mr. Grundy, having attributed the later letters, which Branwell Brontë addressed to him, to the year 1848—though they really belong to 1846—has, with some appearance of consistency, produced the following picture of his friend, under the impression that 'a few days afterwards he died.' But the circumstances that Mr. Grundy's journey to Haworth arose out of

the wish to see him, which Branwell had expressed in a letter written at the time when his father was 'quite blind,' and that, as Mr. Grundy says his visits followed shortly after Branwell had failed to go to Skipton, are themselves sufficient evidence as to the question of date.

Mr. Grundy says of his final interview: 'Very soon I went to Haworth again to see him, for the last time. From the little inn I sent for him to the great, square, cold-looking Rectory. I had ordered a dinner for two, and the room looked cosy and warm, the bright glass and silver pleasantly reflecting the sparkling fire-light, deeply toned by the red curtains. Whilst I waited his appearance, his father was shown in. Much of the Rector's old stiffness of manner was gone. He spoke of Branwell with more affection than I had ever heretofore heard him express, but he also spoke almost hopelessly. He said that when my message came, Branwell was in bed, and had been almost too weak for the last few days to leave it; nevertheless, he had insisted upon coming, and would be there immediately. We parted, and I never saw him again.

'Presently the door opened cautiously, and a head appeared. It was a mass of red, unkempt, uncut hair, wildly floating round a great, gaunt forehead; the cheeks yellow and hollow, the mouth fallen, the thin white lips not trembling but shaking, the sunken eyes, once small, now glaring with the light of madness—all told the sad tale but too surely. I hastened to my friend, greeted him in the gayest manner, as I knew he best liked, drew him quickly into the room, and forced upon him a stiff glass of hot brandy. Under its influence, and that of the bright, cheerful surroundings, he looked frightened—frightened of himself. He glanced at me a moment, and muttered something about leaving a warm bed to come out into the cold night. Another glass of brandy, and returning warmth, gradually brought him back to something like the Brontë of old. He even ate some dinner, a thing which he said he had not done for long; so our last interview was pleasant, though grave. I never knew his intellect clearer. He described himself as waiting anxiously for death —indeed, longing for it, and happy, in these his sane moments, to think that it was so near. He

once again declared that that death would be due to the story I knew, and to nothing else.

'When at last I was compelled to leave, he quietly drew from his coat sleeve a carving-knife, placed it on the table, and holding me by both hands, said that, having given up all thoughts of ever seeing me again, he imagined when my message came that it was a call from Satan. Dressing himself, he took the knife, which he had long had secreted, and came to the inn, with a full determination to rush into the room and stab the occupant. In the excited state of his mind he did not recognise me when he opened the door, but my voice and manner conquered him, and "brought him home to himself," as he expressed it. I left him standing bareheaded in the road, with bowed form and dropping tears. A few days afterwards he died. . . . . His age was twenty-eight.'[1]

Mr. Grundy's account of this interview is inconsistent in itself. Of course, if his friend had really been so far gone as he represents, it is incredible that Mr. Brontë would have been privy to his son's visit to the inn. It is quite

[1] 'Pictures of the Past,' pp. 90-92.

clear that Mr. Grundy's recollection of the interview, and of Branwell's appearance, at this distance of time, with Mrs. Gaskell's account before him, has received a new significance. I incline to the belief that the truth of the matter is this: that, in the spirit of his letters to Leyland, Branwell acted a part, and imposed this ruse upon his friend to gratify the peculiar humour that was then upon him, an episode which the latter, with his erroneous impression as to the date, has been led to depict in somewhat lurid colours. It is most probable, indeed, that, like Hamlet, he 'put an antic disposition on.' Something confirmatory of this view will appear in the next chapter. Among his friends, as I know, Branwell would now and then assume an indignant, and sometimes a furious mood, and put on airs of wild abstraction from which he suddenly recovered, and was again calm and natural, smiling, indeed, at his successful impersonation of passions he scarcely felt at the time. The absence of further correspondence between Branwell and Mr. Grundy, and the fact that the Skipton and Bradford railway, for which that gentleman was resident engineer, was fully opened more than a year before Bran-

well's death, seem to indicate that further intercourse ceased between the two at this date. It would not, perhaps, have been necessary to trouble the reader with these explanations, had not Mr. Grundy's narrative of his last evening with Branwell appeared to receive some sort of confirmation through its republication by Miss Robinson, in her picture of the brother of Emily Brontë shortly before his end.

Again Branwell wrote to Leyland:

'DEAR SIR,

'I had a letter written, and intended to have been forwarded to you a few days after I last left the ensnaring town of Halifax.

'That letter, from being kept so long in my pocket-book, has gone out of date, so I have burnt it, and now send a short note as a precursor to an awfully lengthy one.

'I have much to say to you with which you would probably be sadly bored; but, as it will be only asking for advice, I hope you will feel as a cat does when her hair is stroked down towards her tail. She *purrs* then; but she *spits* when it is stroked upwards.

'I wish Mr. —— of —— would send me my

bill of what I owe him, and the moment that I receive my outlaid cash, or any sum that may fall into my hands, I shall settle it.

'That settlement, I have some reason to hope, will be shortly.

'But can a few pounds make a fellow's soul like a calm bowl of creamed milk?

'If it can, I should like to drink that bowl dry.

'I shall write more at length (Deo Volente) on matters of much importance to me, but of little to yourself.

'Yours in the bonds,

'SANCTUS PATRICIUS BRANWELLIUS BRONTËIO.'

With the foregoing letter, Branwell enclosed a page containing three spirited sketches. The first is a scene in which the sculptor and Branwell are the principal actors. They are seated on stools, facing one another, each holding a wine glass, and, between them on the ground, is a decanter. Behind the sculptor is placed the mutilated statue of Theseus. A copy of Cowper's 'Anatomy' is open at the title-page; and, leaning over it, is a figure of Admodeus, Setebos, or some other winged imp, taking

sight at the two. The second sketch is of Branwell himself, represented as a recumbent statue, resting on a slab, under which are the following mournful lines:—

'Thy soul is flown,
And clay alone
Has nought to do with joy or care;
So if the light of light be gone,
There come no sorrows crowding on,
And powerless lies DESPAIR.'

The third drawing is a landscape, having in the foreground a head-stone, with a skull and crossbones in the semi-circular head. On the stone are carved the words, HIC JACET. Distant peaked hills bound the view. Two pines are to the right of the picture, and the crescent moon, which represents a human profile, is accommodated with a pipe. Underneath it is inscribed the sentence:

'MARTINI LUIGI IMPLORA ETERNA QUIETE!'

The following letter, written to Leyland a little later, shows again the stormy perturbations of Branwell's mind. He still clings to the fond imagination that he is the object of

the lady's unwavering devotion; and, with the incoherency of the monomania with which he continues to be afflicted, he solemnly declares to the sculptor that he had said to no one what he is then saying to him; while, in truth, he was telling the story of his disappointed hopes to all who would hear the recital. The theme is that of a wild, eager, and unavailing love—whose joys and sorrows he tells in vivid words—which he believes to be returned with equal energy and passion.

'My dear Sir,

'I am going to write a scrawl, for the querulous egotism of which I must entreat your mercy; but, when I look *upon* my past, present, and future, and then *into* my own self, I find much, however unpleasant, that yearns for utterance.

'This last week an honest and kindly friend has warned me that concealed hopes about one lady should be given up, let the effort to do so cost what it may. He is the ——, and was commanded by ——, M. P. for ——, to return me, unopened, a letter which I addressed to

——, and which the Lady was not permitted to see. She too, surrounded by powerful persons who hate me like Hell, has sunk into religious melancholy, believes that her weight of sorrow is God's punishment, and hopelessly resigns herself to her doom. God only knows what it does cost, and will, hereafter, cost me, to tear from my heart and remembrance the thousand recollections that rush upon me at the thought of four years gone by. Like ideas of sunlight to a man who has lost his sight, they must be bright phantoms not to be realized again.

'I had reason to hope that ere very long I should be the husband of a Lady whom I loved best in the world, and with whom, in more than competence, I might live at leisure to try to make myself a name in the world of posterity, without being pestered by the small but countless botherments, which, like mosquitoes, sting us in the world of work-day toil. That hope and herself are *gone*—*she* to wither into patiently pining decline,—*it* to make room for drudgery, falling on one now ill-fitted to bear it. That ill-fittedness rises from causes which I should find myself able partially to overcome,

had I bodily strength; but, with the want of that, and with the presence of daily lacerated nerves, the task is not easy. I have been, in truth, too much petted through life, and, in my last situation, I was so much master, and gave myself so much up to enjoyment, that now, when the cloud of ill-health and adversity has come upon me, it will be a disheartening job to work myself up again, through a new life's battle, from the position of five years ago, to that from which I have been compelled to retreat with heavy loss and no gain. My army stands now where it did then, but mourning the slaughter of Youth, Health, Hope, and both mental and physical elasticity.

'The last two losses are, indeed, important to one who once built his hopes of rising in the world on the possession of them. Noble writings works of art, music, or poetry, now, instead of rousing my imagination, cause a whirlwind of blighting sorrow that sweeps over my mind with unspeakable dreariness; and, if I sit down and try to write, all ideas that used to come, clothed in sunlight, now press round me in funereal black; for really every pleasurable ex

citement that I used to know has changed to insipidity or pain.

'I shall never be able to realize the too sanguine hopes of my friends, for at twenty-nine I am a thoroughly *old man*, mentally and bodily —far more, indeed, than I am willing to express. God knows I do not scribble like a poetaster when I quote Byron's terribly truthful words—

'"No more—no more—oh! never more on me
The freshness of the heart shall fall like dew,
Which, out of all the lovely things we see,
Extracts emotions beautiful and new!"

'I used to think that if I could have, for a week, the free range of the British Museum—the library included—I could feel as though I were placed for seven days in Paradise; but now, really, dear sir, my eyes would rest upon the Elgin marbles, the Egyptian saloon, and the most treasured columns, like the eyes of a dead cod-fish.

'My rude, rough acquaintances here ascribe my unhappiness solely to causes produced by my sometimes irregular life, because they have known no other pains than those resulting from excess or want of ready cash. They do not

know that I would rather want a shirt than want a springy mind, and that my total want of happiness, were I to step into York Minster now, would be far, far worse than their want of a hundred pounds when they might happen to need it; and that, if a dozen glasses, or a bottle of wine, drives off their cares, such cures only make me outwardly passable in company, but *never* drive off mine.

'I know only that it is time for me to be something, when I am nothing, that my father cannot have long to live, and that, when he dies, my evening, which is already twilight, will become night; that I shall then have a constitution still so strong that it will keep me years in torture and despair, when I should every hour pray that I might die.

'I know that I am avoiding, while I write, one greatest cause of my utter despair; but, by G——, sir, it is nearly too bitter for me to allude to it!' Here follow a number of references to the subject, with which the reader is already familiar, and therefore it is unnecessary to repeat them here. Then Branwell continues:

'To no one living have I said what I now say to you, and I should not bother yourself with my incoherent account, did I not believe that you would be able to understand somewhat of what I meant—though *not all*, sir; for he who is without hope, and knows that his clock is at twelve at night, cannot communicate his feelings to one who finds *his* at twelve at noon.'

CHAPTER X.

BRANWELL BRONTË AND 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS.'

'Wuthering Heights'—Reception of the Book by the Public—It is Misunderstood—Its Authorship—Mr. Dearden's Account—Statements of Mr. Edward Sloane and Mr. Grundy—Remarks by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid—Correspondences between 'Wuthering Heights' and Branwell's Letters—The 'Carving-knife Episode'—Further Correspondences—Resemblances of Thought in Branwell and Emily.

We have now become acquainted with the principal features of Branwell's career, have obtained some insight into his character, and learned much respecting his genius. We have gained also some knowledge of the history of the Brontë sisters in that most crucial period of their lives, when they returned again to literature with the new earnest which led them to fame.

We have seen that it was Branwell who first seriously undertook the production of a novel, and we have noticed Mr. Grundy's statement concerning the authorship of 'Wuthering Heights.' Here, then, is the proper place in which to say something on this question; for there have not been wanting others also to assert that Branwell was, in great part, the writer of it. Miss Robinson, in her 'Emily Brontë,' dismisses the assertion as altogether untrue; but she rightly says, as all will agree, that 'in the contemptuous silence of those who know their falsity, such slanders live and thrive like unclean insects under fallen stones.' It cannot, therefore, be inappropriate, in such a work as the present, to record, as clearly and succinctly as may be, what has been said on the subject, and to make a suggestion—for it is nothing more—as to what is the truth of the matter.

When 'Wuthering Heights,' after its slow progress through the press, was given to the world in the December of 1847, neither the critics nor the public were very well able to grasp its meaning. Reviewers, to quote Char-

lotte Brontë, 'too often remind us of the mob of Astrologers, Chaldeans, and Soothsayers gathered before the "writing on the wall," and unable to read the characters or make known the interpretation.' In 'Wuthering Heights' they found the subject disagreeable, the characters brutal, the conception crude, and the object of the work wholly unintelligible. The most that could be made of it, was that some rude soul in the north of England, burning with spite against his species, had set himself, with intent little short of diabolical, to lay open the most vicious depths of selfishness and crime, which he had embodied in the actions of characters so lost and revolting, that the mind recoiled with a shudder from the perusal of the monstrosity he had created. One critic, who dwelt at some length on the want of 'tone' and polish in the book, surmised that the writer of it had suffered, 'not disappointment in love, but some great mortification of pride,' which had so embittered his spirit that he had prepared this stinging story in vengeance on his species, and had flung it, crying, 'There, take

that!' with cynical pleasure, in the very teeth of humankind.

This writer even felt it his duty to caution young people against the book. 'It ought to be banished from refined society,' he says. 'The whole tone of the book smacks of lowness.'—'A person may be ill-mannered from want of delicacy of perception or cultivation, or ill-mannered intentionally; the author of "Wuthering Heights" is both.'—'But the taint of vulgarity in our author extends deeper than mere snobbishness; he is rude, because he prefers to be so.' I quote these remarks, as an extreme instance, to show that a critic, who could recognize the great imaginative power, the subtlety, the keen insight, and the fine dramatic character of 'Wuthering Heights,' yet felt such a strong repugnance to its unknown author that he thought him unfit to associate with his fellow-men. It never crossed the minds of the critics in those times that the book could be by any but a man of strong personal character, and one with a wide experience of the dark side of human nature.

However, a feeling speedily grew up that 'Wuthering Heights' was an earlier and immature production, attempted to be palmed off upon the public, of the author of 'Jane Eyre,' against whom a charge of bad faith was thereby virtually made; and even Sydney Dobell (in the 'Palladium' of September, 1850), the first critic who had sympathy enough with genius to discern the nature and comprehend the significance of the book, did not escape this error. It is not necessary here to repeat the unfortunate consequences of this misundering, which caused Charlotte eventually to throw off the disguise, and declare openly that 'Wuthering Heights' was the work of her sister Emily. 'Unjust and grievous error!' says Charlotte. 'We laughed at it at first, but I deeply lament it now.' In the face of her statement, further remark on the authorship was naturally silenced; but, from time to time, when the book was discussed, much astonishment was manifested that a simple and inexperienced girl, like Emily Brontë, had been able to draw, with such nervous and morbid analysis, so sombre a picture of the workings of passions which she

could never have actually known, and of natures 'so relentless and implacable, of spirits so lost and fallen,' as those of Heathcliff and Hindley Earnshaw.

A writer in the 'Cornhill Magazine'[1] who attributes to Emily Brontë the distinction that she has written a book 'which stands as completely alone in the language as does "Paradise Lost," or the "Pilgrim's Progress,"' thus speaks of it: 'Its power,' he says, 'is absolutely Titanic; from the first page to the last it reads like the intellectual throes of a giant. It is fearful, it is true, and perhaps one of the most unpleasant books ever written: but we stand in amaze at the almost incredible fact that it was written by a slim country girl, who would have passed in a crowd as an insignificant person, and who had had little or no experience of the ways of the world. In Heathcliff, Emily Brontë has drawn the greatest villain extant, after Iago. He has no match out of Shakespeare. The Mephistopheles of Goethe's "Faust" is a person of gentlemanly proclivities compared with Heathcliff . . . . . But "Wuthering Heights" is a

[1] Vol. xxviii, p. 54. 1873.

marvellous curiosity in literature. We challenge the world to produce another work in which the whole atmosphere seems so surcharged with suppressed electricity, and bound in with the blackness of tempest and desolation.'

Perhaps this same grim and Titanic power of 'Wuthering Heights' is one reason why many readers do not understand it fully. 'It is possible,' Mr. Swinburne says, 'that, to take full delight in Emily Brontë's book, one must have something by natural inheritance of her instinct, and something by earlier association of her love of the special points of earth—the same lights, and sounds, and colours, and odours, and sights, and shapes of the same fierce, free landscape of tenantless, and fruitless, and fenceless moor.'

But the composition of 'Wuthering Heights' was in great part incomprehensible to Charlotte herself, though she endeavours to account for it by a consideration of her sister's character and circumstances. For, as we have seen, she says, 'I am bound to avow that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst whom she lived, than a nun has of

the country people who sometimes pass her convent gates.'

'"Wuthering Heights,"' to quote Charlotte Brontë's Preface to the new edition of it, 'was hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials. The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor; gazing thereon, he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister; a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur —power. He wrought with a rude chisel, from no model but the vision of his meditations. With time and labour, the crag took human shape; and there it stands colossal, dark, and frowning, half statue, half rock: in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey, and moorland moss clothes it; and heath, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance, grows faithfully close to the giant's foot.'

Many years ago, a writer in the 'People's Magazine,' speaking of the authorship of 'Wuthering Heights,' said: 'Who would suppose that Heathcliff, a man who never swerved from his arrow-straight course to perdition from his

cradle to his grave, . . . had been conceived by a timid and retiring female? But this was the case.' The perusal of this sentence led Mr. William Dearden—author of the 'Star Seer' and the 'Maid of Caldene'—who was acquainted with Branwell Brontë, to communicate to the 'Halifax Guardian,' in June, 1867, some facts, within his personal knowledge, touching the question, which he extracted from the MS. preface to his poem entitled, 'The Demon Queen,' not then published.

It appears, from this account, that Branwell and Mr. Dearden had entered into a friendly poetic contest. Each was to write a poem in which the principal character was to have a real or imaginary existence before the Deluge. They met, on the occasion, at the 'Cross Roads,' a hostel a little more than a mile from Haworth on the road to Keighley, where an evening was spent in the reading of their respective productions. Leyland was to decide upon the merits of the poems. In reference to this meeting Mr. Dearden says,

'We met at the time and place appointed . . . . I read the first act of the "Demon

Queen;" but, when Branwell dived into his hat —the usual receptacle of his fugitive scraps— where he supposed he had deposited his MS. poem, he found he had by mistake placed there a number of stray leaves of a novel on which he had been trying his "prentice hand." Chagrined at the disappointment he had caused, he was about to return the papers to his hat, when both friends earnestly pressed him to read them, as they felt a curiosity to see how he could wield the pen of a novelist. After some hesitation, he complied with the request, and riveted our attention for about an hour, dropping each sheet, when read, into his hat. The story broke off abruptly in the middle of a sentence, and he gave us the sequel, *vivâ voce*, together with the real names of the prototypes of his characters; but, as some of these personages are still living, I refrain from pointing them out to the public. He said he had not yet fixed upon a title for his production, and was afraid he should never be able to meet with a publisher who would have the hardihood to usher it into the world. The scene of the fragment which Branwell read, and the

characters introduced in it—so far as then developed—were the same as those in "Wuthering Heights," which Charlotte Brontë confidently asserts was the production of her sister Emily.'

Another friend of Branwell Brontë also, Mr. Edward Sloane of Halifax, author of a work entitled, 'Essays, Tales, and Sketches,' (1849) declared to Mr. Dearden that Branwell had read to him, portion by portion, the novel as it was produced, at the time, insomuch that he no sooner began the perusal of 'Wuthering Heights,' when published, than he was able to anticipate the characters and incidents to be disclosed.[1] Thus Mr. Dearden and the late

[1] It should be stated, perhaps, that one recent newspaper writer, possibly with the intention of discrediting any claim that might be set up for Branwell's authorship of 'Wuthering Heights,' has drawn from the depths of his memory, or, possibly, of his imagination, a story that Branwell had read to him, as his own, the plot of 'Shirley.' But, since 'Shirley' was not commenced very many months before Branwell's death, and since he had been in his grave a year when it was published, it is obviously impossible that he can ever have desired to draw to himself the praise which was bestowed upon it. And this ingenious writer has adopted, curiously enough, almost the

Mr. Sloane claimed to have knowledge of 'Wuthering Heights' as the work of Branwell, before it was issued from the press; and we have seen that Mr. Grundy declares Branwell to have said, with the consent of his sister, that he had written 'a great portion of "Wuthering Heights" himself,' a statement which, remembering the 'weird fancies of diseased genius' with which Branwell had entertained him at Luddenden Foot, inclined Mr. Grundy to believe 'that the very plot was his invention rather than his sister's.'[1]

The evidence for the original ascription of authorship is simple in the extreme. Charlotte Brontë has told us in the Biographical Notice, as well as in the Preface, which she has prefixed to 'Wuthering Heights,' that the book was the work of Ellis Bell; and clearly no shadow of doubt was on her mind at the time as to the accuracy of this statement; nor had

phraseology of Mr. Dearden's account, published eighteen years ago, saying, 'he took from his hat, the usual receptacle, &c.,' which suggests an impression of unconscious plagiarism.

[1] 'Pictures of the Past,' by Francis H. Grundy, C.E. 1879, p. 80.

the publisher of the book any uncertainty as to the matter. Moreover, the servant Martha is said to have seen Emily Brontë writing it. We are told, also, that it is impossible that the upright spirit of the gentle Emily could resort to the miserable fraud of appropriating a work which was not her own. And, lastly, modern critics have not found it difficult to believe that a woman might be the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' They see nothing incongruous or impossible in the possession, by a feminine intellect, of such a searching knowledge of sinister propensities as are developed in that book, nor of its descending to those chaotic depths of black moral distortion, where it is possible for Hindley Earnshaw, with hideous blasphemy, to drink damnation to his soul, that he may be able to 'punish its Maker,' and where the life-long vengeance of Heathcliff is drawn out, with wondrous power, to its ghastly and impotent end.

How far Charlotte's statement is weakened by the fact that, up to the time when she discovered the volume of verse, and the three sisters commenced their novels—at which period

it will be remembered one volume of Branwell's work was written—they had made no communication to one another of the literary work which each had in progress, is, perhaps, a matter for personal opinion. The declaration of Martha would probably be of little value, unless we knew that what Emily was writing was entirely independent of Branwell's work. And, again, those who have sought to defend Ellis Bell from the charge of fraud, have perhaps been over hasty; for, so far as I know, that charge has never been either made or implied.

As to the capability of Branwell to write 'Wuthering Heights,' not much need be said here. Those who read this book will see that, despite his weaknesses and his follies, Branwell was, indeed, unfortunate in having to bear the penalty, in ceaseless open discussion, of 'une fanfaronnade des vices qu'il n'avait pas,' and that, moreover, his memory has been darkened, and his acts misconstrued, by sundry writers, who have endeavoured to find in his character the source of the darkest passages in the works of his sisters.

Far from being hopelessly a 'miserable fel-

low,' an 'unprincipled dreamer,' an 'unnerved and garrulous prodigal,' as we have been told he was, he had, in fact, within him, an abundance of worthy ambition, a modest confidence in his own ability, which he was never known to vaunt, and a just pride in the celebrity of his family, which, it may be trusted, will remove from him, at any rate, the imputation of a lack of moral power to do anything good or forcible at all.

Those who have heard fall from the lips of Branwell Brontë—and they are few now—all those weird stories, strange imaginings, and vivid and brilliant disquisitions on the life of the people of the West Riding, will recognize that there was at least no opposition, but rather an affinity, between the tendency of his thoughts and those of the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' And, as to special points in the story, it may be said that Branwell Brontë had tasted most of the passions, weaknesses, and emotions there depicted; had loved, in frenzied delusion, as fiercely as Heathcliff loved; as with Hindley Earnshaw, too, in the pain of loss, 'when his ship struck; the captain abandoned his post;

and the crew, instead of trying to save her, rushed into riot and confusion, leaving no hope for their luckless vessel.' He had, too, indeed, manifested much of the doating folly of the unhappy master of the 'Heights'; and, finally, there is no doubt that he possessed, nevertheless, almost as much force of character, determination, and energy as Heathcliff himself.

The following extract from a lecture by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid, will show the opinion of that gentleman—which he applies to prove that Branwell was in part the subject of his sister's work—that there is a distinct correspondence in the feelings and utterances of Heathcliff and Branwell in this book, which, as he observes, critics have again and again declared to be like the dream of an opium-eater, which we have seen that Branwell was. Mr. Reid states: 'I said that, perhaps, the most striking part of "Wuthering Heights" was that which deals with the relations of Heathcliff and Catherine, after she had become the wife of another. Whole pages of the story are filled with the ravings and ragings of the villain against the man whose life stands between him and the woman he

loves. Similar ravings are to be found in all the letters of Branwell Brontë written at this period of his career; and we may be sure that similar ravings were always on his lips, as, moody and more than half mad, he wandered about the rooms of the parsonage at Haworth. Nay, I have found some striking verbal coincidences between Branwell's own language and passages in "Wuthering Heights." In one of his own letters there are these words in reference to the object of his passion: "My own life without her will be hell. What can the so-called love of her wretched, sickly husband be to her compared with mine?" Now, turn to "Wuthering Heights," and you will read these words: "Two words would comprehend my future—*death* and *hell:* existence, after losing her, would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton's attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day."[1]

If Mr. Reid had quoted the beginning of this

[1] Lecture by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid.

paragraph, another point of correspondence would have been perceived between the feelings manifested in it and those which had actuated Branwell Brontë. Heathcliff is speaking: '"You suppose she has nearly forgotten me?" he said. "Oh, Nelly! you know she has not! You know as well as I do, that for every thought she spends on Linton, she spends a thousand on me! At a most miserable period of my life, I had a notion of the kind: it haunted me on my return to the neighbourhood last summer; but only her own assurance could make me admit the horrible idea again. And then, Linton would be nothing, nor Hindley, nor all the dreams that ever I dreamt!"'

We have seen that, in the summer of 1845, Branwell lost his employment, and returned to the neighbourhood of Haworth, and that he, too, at that most miserable period of *his* life, when he wrote his novel, and 'Real Rest,' and 'Penmaenmawr,' had had a notion that the lady of his affections had nearly forgotten him.

It may be observed that Catherine Earnshaw, in an earlier part of the book, uses a like antithesis to that quoted by Mr. Reid. 'What-

ever our souls are made of,' says she, speaking of Heathcliff and herself, 'his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.' Though it is not strictly accurate that in *all* Branwell's letters at this period there are similar ravings, or that such were always on his lips, there are, at all events, other coincidences of thought and expression to be found in his letters and poems with certain features and passages in 'Wuthing Heights,' which are not less striking. A few instances will illustrate much in that work which it is not easy to believe could have been transcribed by the writer from the utterances of another. Even so early as his letter to John Brown, we have seen with what force Branwell could express himself when he chose. He speaks in that letter of one who 'will be used as the tongs of hell,' and of another 'out of whose eyes Satan looks as from windows.' Let us turn to where Heathcliff's eyes are described, in Chapter vii. of the novel, as 'that couple of black fiends, so deeply buried, who never open their windows boldly, but lurk glinting under them, like devil's spies;' and, in

Chapter xvii., where Isabella Heathcliff says of them: 'The clouded windows of hell flashed a moment towards me; the fiend which usually looked out, however, was so dimmed and drowned that I did not fear to hazard another sound of derision.'

We have noticed how Branwell plays upon the word *castaway* at the close of his letter on his novel. Charlotte has said they all had a leaning to Cowper's poem, 'The Castaway,' and appropriated it in one way or another; she told Mrs. Gaskell that Branwell had done so. The word is used twice in 'Wuthering Heights.' Heathcliff is described as having been a 'little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway,' and the younger Catherine addresses pious Joseph, oddly enough, and by a coincidence singular enough, remembering Branwell's allusion in his letter, in these words: 'No, reprobate! you are a castaway—be off, or I'll hurt you seriously! I'll have you all modelled in wax and clay.'

Mention may also be made here, with reference to the occurrence of the names 'Linton' and 'Hareton' in 'Wuthering Heights,' that,

somewhat before the time of the writing of his novel, Branwell was accustomed frequently to visit a place of the former designation, and that he had, as we have seen, when he was in Broughton-in-Furness, a friend of the name of Ayrton.

In the above letter on his novel it will be remembered, in speaking of the character of his work, that Branwell says he hopes to leap from the present bathos of fictitious literature to the firmly fixed rock honoured by the foot of a Smollett or a Fielding, and speaks of revealing man's heart as faithfully as in the pages of 'Hamlet' or 'Lear.' In the first four chapters of 'Wuthering Heights,' which serve as prelude to the darker portions of the story, we are introduced to the inmates of the farm that gives its name to the novel. Mr. Lockwood, who has rented Thrushcross Grange of Heathcliff, and has come to reside there, relates his experience of two visits he pays to his landlord at the 'Heights.' In the excellent humour of this portion of the story we are certainly reminded of Branwell Brontë, and perhaps of Smollett and Fielding too. The succeeding

chapters are related in a manner more subdued, proper to the narration of the housekeeper. There is just one mention of 'King Lear' in 'Wuthering Heights,' on the second of these visits, when, at last, Mr. Lockwood, after he has been knocked down by the dogs, addresses the inmates of the 'Heights,' 'with several incoherent threats of retaliation, that, in their infinite depth of virulency, smacked of "King Lear."' More than once have this story and Shakspeare's great tragedy been named in kinship, and Miss Robinson, unaware of Branwell's observation on his own prose tale, gives a second place, with 'King Lear,' to 'Wuthering Heights.'

It is impossible to read 'Wuthering Heights' without being struck with the part which consumption and death are made to play in the progress of the story. Scarcely a character is there depicted in whom we do not recognize some trait, some weakness, remotely or more closely, indicating deep-seated phthisis; and evidences of a true and certain observation, in the writer, are to be found in the pictures of its power there delineated. In Branwell's poem

on 'Caroline,' we have already seen with what certain touch he depicts her death from that disease; and how deeply, and almost morbidly, he broods on its ravages; and, in one of his later poems, we have a second and more striking picture of decline. In Emily's verse anything of the kind is entirely wanting; and, indeed, it is what we miss in her poems, even more than what we find in Branwell's, that must ever surprise us when we look for the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' Branwell, in his writings, is often engaged with subjects of real and personal interest, and the scheme of his work is apparent. Several of his poems, indeed, when once read, leave an impress on the memory which is evidence enough of the power and originality by which they are inspired. For the most part, Emily's poems are impersonal, imaginative, and ideal.

It will be remembered that Mr. Grundy, in his 'Pictures of the Past,' has given an account of his last interview with Branwell, which he declares took place but a few days before Branwell died. I have shown conclusively that the interview is ascribed by Mr. Grundy, and by

Miss Robinson following him, to a wrong date, and that it took place, in fact, in 1846, when the manuscript was still in the author's hands, perhaps, indeed, undergoing revision at the time. Branwell, according to his friend, had concealed in his coat sleeve, on this occasion, a carving-knife, with which, in his frenzy, he designed to kill the devil, whose call, he supposed, had summoned him to the inn; and he was surprised to find Mr. Grundy there instead. I have surmised that, when this grotesque episode occurred, Branwell was but jesting with his friend, who, in his surprise, took him altogether *au sérieux;* and, remembering that Mr. Grundy says Branwell had declared to him before that 'Wuthering Heights' was in great part his own work, it will be seen that there are passages in the novel which seem to lend probability both to this surmise as to Branwell's intention, and also to Mr. Grundy's statement. Thus, in Chapter ix., Hindley Earnshaw returns to the house in a state of frenzied intoxication, and, finding Nelly Dean stowing away his son in a cupboard, he flies at her with a madman's rage, crying: 'By heaven and hell, you've sworn between you to murder that

child! I know how it is, now, that he is always out of my way. But, with the help of Satan, I shall make you swallow the carving-knife, Nelly! You needn't laugh; for I've just crammed Kenneth, head-downmost, in the Blackhorse marsh; two is the same as one—and I want to kill some of you: I shall have no rest till I do!' To which Nelly Dean replies, 'But I don't like the carving-knife, Mr. Hindley; it has been cutting red herrings. I'd rather be shot, if you please.' Again, in Chapter xvii., when Isabella's taunts have stung Heathcliff to retaliation, he snatches up a dinner-knife and flings it at her head; and she is struck beneath the ear. We may believe, then, that when Branwell appeared in this strange guise before his friend, he was but jestingly rehearsing in act, with an 'antic disposition' such incidents as he had recently described in the volume he had mentioned to Mr. Grundy.

Miss Robinson, in her 'Emily Brontë' (p. 95), has some sarcastic remarks about Branwell's pride in his family name. 'Proud of his name!' she writes: 'He wrote a poem on it, "Brontë," an eulogy of Nelson, which won the patronizing

approbation of Leigh Hunt, Miss Martineau, and others, to whom, at his special request, it was submitted. Had he ever heard of his dozen aunts and uncles, the Pruntys of Ahaderg? Or if not, with what sensations must the Vicar (*sic*) of Haworth have listened to this blazoning forth and triumphing over the glories of his ancient name?' Branwell's pride in the name of Brontë would have been foolish enough if it had been of the nature Miss Robinson supposes; but perhaps it had another meaning. At any rate Nelly Dean puts pride of birth in quite a different light in 'Wuthering Heights,' where she gives good advice to Heathcliff. 'You're fit for a prince in disguise,' she says even to the 'little Lascar,' the 'American or Spanish castaway.' 'Who knows but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England. Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I

was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!' This was exactly what Branwell Brontë did.

There are two other points in which I will indicate correspondences between the phraseology and ideas of 'Wuthering Heights' and those of Branwell Brontë. In one of his letters here published, Branwell, sketching a criminal grinning with the halter round his neck, asks the question: 'Is there really such a thing as the *Risus Sardonicus*? Did a man ever laugh the morning he was to be hanged?' Now, in the novel, Isabella Heathcliff says: 'I was in the condition of mind to be shocked at nothing: in fact, I was as reckless as some malefactors show themselves at the foot of the gallows.' Lastly, Heathcliff declares, speaking of Hindley Earnshaw: 'Correctly, that fool's body should be buried at the cross-roads, without ceremony of any kind.' Now Branwell was not only familiar with the traditions of suicides buried at the cross-roads near Haworth, as well as at similiar cross-roads, but he was accustomed, in his perambulations through the district, when in this direction, to visit the ancient hostel at that

place: and, indeed, it was this house he fixed upon for the reading of the poem he had written, and where he read, as we have seen, in lieu of it, the portion of his novel, surmised to be 'Wuthering Heights,' to Mr. Dearden and his other friend. It would be tedious to indicate all the minor similarities of expression in the novel to those in Branwell's letters.

Yet there are two or three points noticeable in 'Wuthering Heights,' which are marked in Emily's verse. Emily's love of Nature, of the moors; her deep brooding on the mystery of being, which led her to look on the calm of death as an assurance of future rest for all, are to be found in her poetry; and, in a lesser degree, also in 'Wuthering Heights.' Thus we read, in Chapter xvi. of the story, of Linton and his dead wife: 'Next morning—bright and cheerful out of doors—stole softened in through the blinds of the silent room, and suffused the couch and its occupant with a mellow, tender glow. Edgar Linton had his head laid on the pillow, and his eyes shut. His young and fair features were almost as deathlike as those of the form beside him, and

almost as fixed: but *his* was the hush of exhausted anguish, and *hers* of perfect peace. Her brow smooth, her lids closed, her lips wearing the expression of a smile; no angel in heaven could be more beautiful than she appeared. And I partook of the infinite calm in which she lay: my mind was never in a holier frame than while I gazed on that untroubled image of Divine rest. I instinctively echoed the words she had uttered a few hours before: "Incomparably beyond and above us all! Whether still on earth or now in heaven, her spirit is at home with God!"'

The reflections suggested to Nelly Dean by the spectacle of repose presented by the dead Catherine seem to Mr. Reid to be characteristic of Emily, speaking 'out of the fulness of her heart.' 'I don't know if it be a peculiarity in me,' says the narrator in the story, 'but I am seldom otherwise than happy while watching in the chamber of death, should no frenzied or despairing mourner share the duty with me. I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break, and I feel an assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter—the Eternity they

have entered—where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy, and joy in its fulness. I noticed on that occasion how much selfishness there is even in a love like Mr. Linton's, when he so regretted Catherine's blessed release! To be sure, one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. One might doubt in seasons of cold reflection; but not then, in the presence of her corpse. It asserted its own tranquillity, which seemed a pledge of equal quiet to its former inhabitants.' But Mr. Lockwood is made to say, speaking of the housekeeper's anxiety to know if he thinks such people are happy in the other world, 'I declined answering Mrs. Dean's question, which struck me as something heterodox.' The story also concludes, speaking of the head-stones of Edgar Linton, Heathcliff, and Catherine: 'I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet

earth.' But there is in these very points a remarkable coincidence of feeling between Branwell and Emily also. Indeed, in the expression of these thoughts, Branwell's verse is well-nigh more powerful than Emily's. We have known his desire for the oblivious peace of 'Real Rest'; and, in his letters, he has sketched many head-stones, on one of which are the words: 'I implore for rest'; and, in the 'Epistle to a Child in her Grave,' he has told us of the freedom from ill of that quiet and painless sepulchre. Here are a few stray lines of Branwell's, which will serve as illustration of this coincidence:

> 'Think not that Life is happiness,
> But deem it *duty* joined with *care*;
> Implore for *hope* in your distress,
> And for your answers, get *despair*;
> Yet travel on, for Life's rough road
> May end, at last, in rest with *God!*'

Again we may ask: did Branwell Brontë write 'Wuthering Heights,' or any part of it? The evidence that he did so is, probably, insufficient. But let it be remembered that, as stated in his letter to Leyland, he had clearly

undertaken a three-volume novel, and, in one way or other, had written a volume of his story. The charge of falsehood brought against Branwell in his statement to Mr. Grundy will not now probably be renewed; but there may not be wanting some to say that Mr. Grundy is in error in connecting what his friend said to him about his own novel with some allusion of his sister's to 'Wuthering Heights,' and that those gentlemen who believe the novel Branwell read to them to be the same as that attributed to Emily are in error also. It has been said that, on the rare occasions on which the father or brother entered the room where the sisters were writing their novels, nothing was said of the work in progress. But it must be confessed that these views meet with little encouragement from what we know of the history of that period.

We have seen that, prior to the autumn of 1845, Branwell had been employed in writing his novel; a little later, we have reason to suspect that he is not going on with it, and we find him writing a poem with the same theme as a contemporary one of Emily's. We then find the sisters taking up novel-writing with

precisely Branwell's views of the profit to be derived from it. When he writes to Leyland on the 28th of April, 1846, shortly before the poems of his sisters were published, and while they are finishing their novels, Branwell has ceased to speak of his, but says that, if he were in London personally, he would try a certain publisher with his poems. Now it was an edition of Wordsworth by this same publisher that Charlotte had, four months earlier, fixed upon as a model for the sisters' own volume of poems. Branwell, then, however strained his relations with his sister Charlotte might be at this late date, must have known that his sisters were writing their tales. Why, then, the change in his aims? Why is he, who had propounded that view of the superior advantages of prose over poetic writing, which afterwards determined the sisters to write novels, silent about his own, and thinking of publishing his poems? and never again do we hear of any attempt on his part to finish his novel, though he lived a year after his sisters' works were published. What had become of his novel in the interim?

Perhaps there is evidence, then, to warrant us in throwing out a suggestion that there may have been some measure of collaboration between Branwell and his sister, that he originated the idea, moulded the characters, and wrote the earlier portion of the work, which she, taking, revised, amended, completed, and imbued with enough of an individual spirit to give unity to the whole. In support of this view, it may be noted that, though there is no break in the style of 'Wuthering Heights,' yet all the interests of the original story are, in a manner, completed in the seventeenth chapter —that is, something more than half-way through the book. In that first portion of it we trace the vehement passion of Heathcliff for Catherine up to her death. We see his enmity to Edgar Linton, which is satisfied by his possession of Linton's sister, whom he hates and despises, but who is the mother of a child to be heir to Thrushcross Grange, and we see the death of this unhappy wife. In this first portion of the novel is unrolled also the gradual growth of Heathcliff's hatred of Earnshaw, from the time when he says: 'I'm trying to settle how I shall

pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do,' up to the death of that miserable character, whose son remains an ignorant dependent, because his drunken father has been lured to make away with his wealth at the gaming-table to his Mephistophelian pursuer. Here is depicted that dark and malevolent spirit which ranks Heathcliff with the demons, as where he says: 'I have no pity—I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails. It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain.'

In the second part of the story, opening with the eighteenth chapter, we are occupied with the fates of the children of Linton, Earnshaw, and Heathcliff. We learn how the latter trains up his miserable, puling son for the purpose of marrying the daughter of Linton, which he forcibly brings about, and thus completes his possession of the Grange; how he endeavours to pervert the youthful Hareton Earnshaw, to 'see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another with the same wind to twist it;' and in

the end how his vengeance is completely thwarted. Thus there are two distinct parts in 'Wuthering Heights,' one being the completion and complement of the other.

As some evidence for the view here thrown out, I may mention that, in reading 'Wuthering Heights' in order to discover what correspondences there might exist between it and Branwell's writings, in letters, etc., I was very much struck with the fact that, for every five of such correspondences which I discovered in the first part of the novel, I could find only one in the latter. We need not, therefore, be surprised if, in the concluding half of 'Wuthering Heights,' Branwell has stood to the author as model for some details of character, though these can be very few. Yet Nelly Dean does say of Heathcliff's love for Catherine: 'He might have had a monomania on the subject of his departed idol; but on every other point his wits were as sound as mine.'[1]

The collaboration which I have mentioned would by no means imply unfair action on the part of Emily Brontë: she was ever a kind,

[1] 'Wuthering Heights,' chap. xxxiii.

gentle, and faithful friend to Branwell, and had looked forward, perhaps more anxiously than her sisters, to his success in the world. There would be nothing extraordinary, then, in Branwell handing over to his favourite sister, to whom he was always grateful for her abiding affection, the work which he had begun, and which he, perhaps, felt himself dissatisfied with, or unable to complete, or in his supplying her with a plot, and assisting her with his experience in the delineation of the characters in any story she might wish to produce. To have done so would be quite consistent with what we know of him; and he never claimed the authorship, so far as I know, after the occasion of Mr. Grundy's visit to the parsonage twelve months before the publication of the novel; and he read it to two or three personal friends only, and to these, if my supposition be correct, perhaps before his sister had taken up the work.

One other circumstance, besides the disappearance of Branwell's novel, finds explanation in this view of the matter: that Emily, who never undertook a second novel, produced, not only the most original and powerful of the contem-

porary tales of the sisters, but one that is also a much longer story than 'The Professor,' by Charlotte, and half as long again as 'Agnes Grey,' by Anne. Here, then, must probably remain the question of the origin of 'Wuthering Heights.'

CHAPTER XI.

BRANWELL BRONTË AND 'THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL.'

Statement of Charlotte that her Sister Anne wrote the Book in consequence of her Brother's Conduct—Supposition of Some that Branwell was the Prototype of Huntingdon—The Characters are Entirely Distinct—Real Sources of the Story—Anne Brontë at Pains to Avoid a Suspicion that Huntingdon was a Portrait of Branwell.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË, who never dreamed of attributing the production of so dire a story as 'Wuthering Heights,' by her sister Emily, to brooding on Branwell's misfortunes, has, however, in her remarks on Anne Brontë's second novel, 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,'—meant by its author as a tale of warning against the evils of intemperance,—intimated that it was carried out as a duty by Anne, in consequence of the impression made upon her by her brother's con-

duct; and certain writers, questioning the statement of Charlotte that the characters are fictitious, have concluded that, in Arthur Huntingdon, we have 'a picture' and a 'portrait' of Branwell Brontë. It seems to me, rightly considered, a cruel thing to Anne Brontë to believe that she has given us a portrait of her brother in the character of the perfidious Huntingdon. Had her brother been thus vile, she could not have borne to write over the details of his character; were he not like Huntingdon, she could not have libelled him so.

As none of the biographers of the Brontë sisters ever knew Branwell, it is probable that the Branwell Brontë of the biographies owes more to the supposed Branwell of the novels, than the characters in the novels do to the brother of the Brontës. It is Huntingdon's wit, superficial as it is, that has connected him with the ideal of Branwell Brontë. A few traits of his, indeed, there may be in Huntingdon, but they are not the worst of those depicted in that character. The contempt for gambling which Huntingdon expresses may be taken as an instance.

We shall, however, look in vain for any true resemblance between the characters of Arthur Huntingdon and Branwell Brontë, and, certainly, in almost every respect, one is a direct contrast to the other. The biographer of Emily Brontë says, indeed, that Branwell 'sat to Anne sorrily enough for the portrait of Henry (*sic*) Huntingdon;' but I would ask where that portraiture lies? Huntingdon, be it marked, is not only a drunkard, but he is a libertine, a man who has even the callous brutality to recount to his trusting wife, as she sits by him on the sofa, endeavouring to amuse him, the 'stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl, or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation,' she says, 'he lays it to the charge of jealousy, and laughs till the tears run down his cheeks.' But it was different with Branwell, against whom it has never been charged that he sank to these low depths of criminal debauchery, indulgence, and treachery; and even those who have recounted the story of his passion for the wife of his employer, are compelled to say that he remained pure, and shrank in horror from the

advances which they suppose she made. Huntingdon's vicious disposition, too, is so sunk in selfishness, and there is in him such a cold brutality,—as where on many an occasion he triumphs over his powerless wife,—that he is placed in absolute contrast to Branwell, with his confiding, considerate, open-hearted, and generous nature.

It is but necessary to allude to Huntingdon's hypocrisy to establish a further difference between his character and Branwell's; and it is, moreover, very distinctive of Huntingdon's mind that he is, throughout, utterly irreverent and irreligious, to such an extent that he jests at sacred things, and declares that his wife's piety is enough to make him jealous of his Maker. Again he says, when he places her hand on the top of his head, and it sinks in a bed of curls, 'rather alarmingly low, especially in the middle;' 'if God meant me to be religious, why didn't He give me a proper organ of veneration?' This irreverence he carries with him into domestic life, and he invades the sanctity of human affection, and the places the heart keeps holy, with his gross and insensate brutality.

How different is this from Branwell Brontë, in whose character reverence and affection, above all things, were strong! Can we imagine Huntingdon dwelling so fondly in the affection of the long departed, as Branwell does in his poems of 'Caroline;' can we imagine him venerating as a precious possession to his dying day the sacred memories of his early years, as his supposed prototype did? What 'swell of thought,' seeming to fill 'the bursting heart, the gushing eye' with the memories of bygone years, could flood the shallow brain of the selfish and unfeeling Huntingdon? And Huntingdon, too, is afflicted with that well-known complaint of the continual drinker; he loses all interest in the affairs of life, and exists in perpetual levity. 'There is always a "but" in this imperfect world,' says his wife, 'and I do wish he would sometimes be serious. I cannot get him to write or speak in real, solid earnest. I don't much mind it now, but if it be always so what shall I do with the serious part of myself?' I would ask when Branwell Brontë displayed this unseemly levity? if he did not always write and speak in solid earnest; if, indeed, he did not

live in the very midst of that storm and stress of acute feeling which Huntingdon's wretched nature was incapable of experiencing at all?

Lastly, Helen Huntingdon tells us that her husband is impenetrable to good and lofty thoughts, that he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines, that she wishes he would take up some literary study, or learn to draw or play; and that, when deprived of his friends, his condition is comfortless, unalleviated as it is by the consolations of intellectual resources, and the answer of a good conscience towards God. What, then, were Branwell's mental resources? His thoughts, on the contrary, were good and lofty enough; he was a student of literature, and especially a reader of the great poets; he had, indeed, taken up literary work; and he could and did both draw, and play on the organ; and when he was deprived of society, or cast into trouble, he found his consolation in his literary labours, and we have seen that, for the very purpose of obtaining alleviation in distress, he had written a volume of his novel. In short, he was, as far as his intellectual character and habits were

concerned, exactly what Helen Huntingdon wished her husband might be.

If, then, there is no resemblance between Branwell Brontë's disposition, character, and capabilities and those of Huntingdon in the novel, we might, after what has been said, surely expect to find that, in the unique point in which there is a correspondence of fact—their indulgence in drink—there would be some similar traits. But here, again, the resemblance is of the faintest, while the differences are radical. Huntingdon, for instance, is a continual and inveterate drinker; Branwell drank but occasionally, and had long periods of temperance: Huntingdon drinks for the love of drink; Branwell drank in order to drown his sorrows. It is, moreover, made a special point by the Brontë biographers that part of Branwell's intemperance was in taking opium, but this feature does not exist in Huntingdon, though Anne was clearly acquainted with the practice, for she mentions in the novel that Lord Lowborough at one time took it.

But, for the character of Huntingdon, we must look elsewhere. The account Charlotte gave of

one whom the Brontës had known well, will show from what sources Anne drew her plot.

'You remember Mr. and Mrs. ——? Mrs. —— came here the other day, with a most melancholy tale of her wretched husband's drunken, extravagant, profligate habits. She asked papa's advice; there was nothing, she said, but ruin before them. They owed debts which they could never pay. She expected Mr. ——'s instant dismissal from his curacy; she knew, from bitter experience, that his vices were utterly hopeless. He treated her and her child savagely; with much more to the same effect. Papa advised her to leave him for ever, and go home, if she had a home to go to. She said this was what she had long resolved to do; and she would leave him directly, as soon as Mr. B—— dismissed him. She expressed great disgust and contempt towards him, and did not affect to have the shadow of regard in any way. I do not wonder at this, but I *do* wonder she should ever marry a man towards whom her feelings must always have been pretty much the same as they are now. I am morally certain no decent woman could ex-

perience anything but aversion towards such a man as Mr. ——. Before I knew, or suspected his character, and when I rather wondered at his versatile talents, I felt it in an uncontrollable degree. I hated to talk with him—hated to look at him; though, as I was not certain that there was substantial reason for such a dislike, and thought it absurd to trust to mere instinct, I both concealed and repressed the feeling as much as I could; and, on all occasions, treated him with as much civility as I was mistress of. I was struck with Mary's expression of a similar feeling at first sight; she said, when we left him, "That is a hideous man, Charlotte!" I thought, "He is indeed."[1]

And here is another case known to the Brontës. 'Do you remember my telling you —or did I ever tell you—about that wretched and most criminal Mr. ——? After running an infamous career of vice, both in England and France, abandoning his wife to disease and total destitution in Manchester, with two children and without a farthing, in a strange lodging-house? Yesterday evening Martha came

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. ix.

upstairs to say that a woman—"rather lady-like," as she said—wished to speak to me in the kitchen. I went down. There stood Mrs. ——, pale and worn, but still interesting-looking and cleanly and neatly dressed, as was her little girl who was with her. I kissed her heartily. I could almost have cried to see her, for I had pitied her with my whole soul when I heard of her undeserved sufferings, agonies, and physical degradation. She took tea with us, stayed about two hours, and frankly entered into a narrative of her appalling distresses . . . She does not know where Mr. —— is, and of course can never more endure to see him. She is now staying a few days at E—— with the ——s, who, I believe, have been all along very kind to her, and the circumstance is greatly to their credit.'[1]

It was with cases like these before them that the Brontës wrought the infelicity of Heathcliff and Isabella, of Huntingdon and Helen. They felt themselves compelled to represent life as it appeared to them, they said.

[1] T. Wemyss Reid's 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' chap. vii., p. 83.

Consumption and intemperance, the curses of our island and our climate, are found not the less in the West-Riding of Yorkshire. A cold and humid atmosphere, like poverty and want, begets a recourse to stimulants, and, with some natures, the bounds of moderation are soon passed. The prevalence of the latter evil had entered deeply into Anne's thoughts. Her brother's occasional indulgence had made it familiar to her; but we should clearly commit an error, as well as a great injustice to her, in supposing that, in the character of Huntingdon, she wished to present his failings to the public.

A careful study of the question has, indeed, convinced me, not only that Huntingdon is no portrait of Branwell Brontë, but that he is distinctly and designedly his very antitype. The author of 'Wildfell Hall' could scarcely have created a character so completely different from Branwell, unless she intended to do so; for, otherwise, writing under the influence of circumstances, and the inspiration of the moment, something of his strong personality must surely have found its way into the book.

It is pleasant to be thus able to record, as an act of justice to Anne Brontë, that, though she had been compelled to witness the results of intemperance both in Branwell and in others, she purposely conveyed her lesson of these evils in the acts and thoughts of a character utterly distinct from her brother. Indeed, she was at considerable pains—which have unfortunately availed little—to prevent even a suspicion that her brother was the prototype of Huntingdon; for, to remove that impression, she has placed the hero of the story, Gilbert Markham, to a considerable extent, in Branwell's very circumstances. There is no resemblance between Markham's character and Branwell's, beyond that of an ardent and generous temperament; but it should be observed that—exactly as with Branwell—Markham is enamoured of a married woman, the death of whose husband he anxiously awaits; that this passion is attributed to him as a monomania—'A monomania,' says his brother Fergus, 'but don't mention it; all right but that;' and, lastly, that Markham, too, thinks, as Branwell did, that the deceased husband of the lady

'might have so constructed his will as to place restrictions upon her marrying again.'

It should likewise be observed that 'Wildfell Hall' is just as much a protest against *mariages de convenance*, as it is against intemperance; but what had this to do with the family circumstances of the Brontës? It had far more to do with such instances as that of 'Mr. and Mrs. ——,' quoted above from Charlotte's letter, where infelicity was combined with intemperance, as it is in the case of Arthur and Helen Huntingdon.

CHAPTER XII.

BRANWELL'S FAILINGS.—PUBLICATION OF 'JANE EYRE.'

Novel-writing—The Sisters' Method of Work—Branwell's Failing Health and Irregularities—'Jane Eyre'—Its Reception and Character—It was not Influenced by Branwell—Letter and Sketches of Branwell, 1848.

BUT, at this time, neither 'Wuthering Heights' nor 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' was before the public. It was not, indeed, till the summer of 1847 that the former, with 'Agnes Grey,' was accepted for publication. Meanwhile Anne was toiling away at her second book, and Charlotte was writing 'Jane Eyre,' under spells of inspiration.

Mrs. Gaskell has told us that the sisters were wont to put away their work at nine o'clock, and to walk about the sitting-room, talking over

the plots of their stories, and discussing the incidents of them. Once or twice a week each was accustomed to read to the others what she had written, and hear the opinions they passed upon it. Mr. Brontë retired early to rest, and was in ignorance of the nature of the work going on, for his daughters never spoke to him of it, any more than they did to their friends. The writing of the sisters was, in fact, a secret shared only by their brother Branwell, who unquestionably gave his advice upon it, and instructed them on many points, besides, of practical value in their dealings with publishers and literary men, which their small knowledge of the world caused them to overlook.

But, at the time, Branwell's health was visibly failing, and it became evident that, though naturally stronger than his sisters, he was not exempt from the consumptive tendency of his family. All his endeavours to obtain employment had proved futile. His physical health had long been giving way, and this soon rendered him incapable of sustained exertion. Much of his strange conduct arose probably

from the reaction of this weakness on a mind endowed with so much intellectual power.

In most winters on these Yorkshire hills there are spells of severe frost and cold, and these were always times of suffering to the Brontës. Influenza would become epidemic at Haworth, and seldom neglected the inmates of the parsonage, close by the churchyard as the house was. Mr. Brontë had struggled hard to have proper drainage introduced into the village, but in vain. There was, indeed, 'such a series of North-pole days' in the December of 1846, as Charlotte did not remember; the sky looked like ice, and the wind was as keen as a two-edged blade. The consequence was that all the house was laid up with coughs and colds. Anne suffered from asthma; Mr. Brontë and Branwell had influenza and cough. Anxiously must they have watched every indication of change in the wind, and longed for the south-west breezes that, even in winter, sometimes came over the moors with all the softness of spring; and, on this occasion, they were not long disappointed, and Anne became much better. The novel-writing went on as before. Branwell's

weakness and failings sometimes broke in upon this employment, but we do not find that, during the year 1847, he gave such trouble as would be likely to influence his sisters' work. Of course he had little or no money at hand, and we know that he had contracted some small obligations during the period of distraction of the previous year. The result of this was that a sheriff's-officer arrived at Haworth, and Branwell's debts had to be paid, whereat his sister Charlotte seems to have been very angry, for she appears afterwards to accuse herself of being 'too demonstrative and vehement.' About three months later Charlotte was again in doubt about Branwell; she says his behaviour was 'extravagant,' and that he dropped 'mysterious hints,' which led her to believe that he had contracted further debts. In this, however, she was mistaken.

In the May of 1847, Charlotte invited 'E.' to visit her, and said that Branwell was quieter, for the good reason that he had got to the end of a considerable sum of money he became possessed of in the spring, and was obliged to restrict himself in some degree. 'You must,' she continues,

'expect to find him weaker in mind, and the complete rake in appearance. I have no apprehension of his being uncivil to you; on the contrary, he will be as smooth as oil.' It would appear that he had had some sum laid out, which he then recovered; but, as we have seen, he had got into debt before, and, in his alarm at the prospect of imprisonment in York Castle, it is said, told his friends, in the neighbourhood where he had been tutor, of his straits; upon which the widow of his late employer sent him money in kindness of heart, through a third person. At this period he expended much of his time at home in reading, and he wrote several poems.

At the end of July, Charlotte, as we have been told, consulted her brother as to the reason why Messrs. Smith and Elder, to whom she had sent 'The Professor,' did not reply. He at once set it down to her not having enclosed a postage stamp. On the 2nd of August, she wrote again, and promptly received the considerate answer which encouraged her to send to them, on the twenty-fourth of the same month, her three-volume work, 'Jane

Eyre.' This was accepted, and given to the world in the following October. Meanwhile, in the beginning of August, 'E.' had paid her visit to the parsonage, and the friends had enjoyed the glorious weather in walking on the moors. Charlotte had returned the visit almost immediately, and the proofs of 'Jane Eyre' were corrected by her during her absence, sitting even at the same table with her friend, to whom, curiously enough, she said not a word about the work in hand. Upon her return to Haworth, she wrote: 'I reached home, and found all well. Thank God for it.' 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey' still lingered in the hands of the publisher, from whom the authors had obtained but impoverishing terms; 'a bargain,' says Mrs. Gaskell, in mentioning the circumstance, 'to be alluded to further.' Nothing more, however, appears in the 'Life of Charlotte' on the subject; and we may hope that the celebrity which the novels of the 'Messrs. Bell' soon acquired, made a substantial difference in the first terms of the agreement. During the next three months, Charlotte was in correspondence with Messrs.

Smith and Elder, Mr. G. H. Lewes, and Mr. W. S. Williams, in respect of the reviews of 'Jane Eyre,' which were then appearing.

'Jane Eyre' came upon the reading world of 1847 as a veritable revelation. It was a tragic story of the feelings, so different in character from the trite affectations of the commonplace novel of the day; it was informed with such a passionate energy, and filled with such soul-absorbing interests, that it was received at once as a monument of great and undoubted genius. Reading the book to-day, we can easily understand why Charlotte Brontë gained such a mastery over the spirits of her time, and earned for herself an imperishable renown. She would do the same now. The strange, lonely, unfriended childhood of Jane Eyre, the experiences she undergoes at Gateshead, and at the Lowood School, and her confidence and self-reliance through them all, mark the story as vitally true; but, when this plain little personage manifests the depths of her feelings, and calls forth our human sympathies in her hopes and her sorrows; when we read the terrific tragedy of her relationship with Rochester, and

are shaken with the storm and stress of the feelings that move her; when, above all, we see her come out from the shadow, with her nobility and purity unsullied, though once more she is friendless and alone, we are carried beyond ourselves in admiration of the genius who has painted a picture at once so truly human and so very strange.

'Jane Eyre,' the book, was the natural and unforced outcome of its author's personality, and, though Jane Eyre, the character, is not Charlotte Brontë in the sense in which Lucy Snowe is, yet in Charlotte Brontë were all the powers and capabilities that moved Jane Eyre. This book, then, came upon people in 1847 as a revelation; they felt themselves in the hands of a very Titan, and were carried on by an uncontrollable stream. But there were some amongst them who struggled against its influence, when they found that the shallow bounds of conventionality had been far overpassed, and when they saw that its author was little skilled in the ways of the world. These revolted against the power that made them, perforce, interested in a character, in Rochester, who had

fallen away from the high Christian ideal. Hence arose that outcry against what was termed the 'immorality' of the book, against its 'coarseness,' its 'laxity of tone,' and the 'heathenish doctrine of religion' that filled it, which gave such pain, in the parsonage at Haworth, to the simple-minded girl, its author, against whom the dictum of the 'Quarterly Review' was written: 'If we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has for some sufficient reason long forfeited the society of her own sex.

But such critics as these forgot that the people whom we love most in life, are not those who are supremely noble, absolutely perfect, superhuman, and angelic; but those who are beautiful and true in spite of their failings, and though clogged with all the faults with which our humanity has laden them; those who, like the child in Wordsworth's ode, live 'trailing clouds of glory' with them from divinity, in the midst of the shame and sin of the world. These are the lights which illumine 'Jane Eyre,' with a loveliness that is truly and perfectly human. So the book made its way,

after the wild fervour of its first reception, to a pinnacle in English literature where it must ever remain, as the work of a great and original genius, and, as we now know, of a true and noble woman.

Small need was there, then, that Mrs. Gaskell should seek to explain those features of Charlotte's genius, which brought down upon 'Jane Eyre' and its author such expressions of blame as these, by references to her brother's character and history, as she understood them. Whatever may have been the case with the novels of Emily and Anne, those of Charlotte were clearly the outcome of her own nature and of her own experience, and were uninfluenced in one way or other by her brother. If she takes a suggestion from his affairs at all, she deals with it coldly or sternly. Take for instance that passage I have quoted from 'The Professor,' where William Crimsworth speaks of his recollection of an instance of domestic treachery.

In December, 1847, appeared the works of Ellis and Acton Bell. The Christmas of that year found the three sisters noted in the world of authors—Currer Bell, famous. Not often can

so much be recorded of a family. Branwell seems to have been considerably elated by their success, and the festivities of the season were indulged in by him to his injury. His feeble health was soon affected by things that would have had little influence upon ordinarily strong men, and he suffered the consequences. On the 11th of January, 1848, Charlotte writes:—'We have not been very comfortable here at home lately. Branwell has, by some means, continued to get more money from the old quarter, and has led us a sad life .. . . . Papa is harassed day and night; we have little peace; he is always sick; has two or three times fallen down in fits; what will be the ultimate end, God knows. But who is without their drawback, their scourge, their skeleton behind the curtain? It remains only to do one's best, and endure with patience what God sends.' In this month the second edition of 'Jane Eyre' appeared.

It must have been in reference to this period that Mrs. Gaskell has said it might well have happened that Branwell had shot his father. But the statement is an exaggeration; and, indeed, I have been told, both by Martha Brown

and Nancy Wainwright, that Branwell was not nearly so bad as Mrs. Gaskell has made him appear. 'If he had wanted to shoot his father,' says my informant, 'he could easily have done it, for there were loaded guns and pistols hung over the bed-room door constantly.' She relates that, on one occasion, she was occupied in tidying up the bed-room, and had just taken down the fire-arms to dust, when Mr. Brontë entered the room in great consternation, forbidding her, at any time thenceforth, on any account whatever, to meddle with them, for they were loaded even then, and might have been accidentally discharged to her own danger. He again hung up the arms himself. Mr. Brontë carried on this singular practice, and could not be induced to discontinue it; and, as the reader is aware, Branwell and his father occupied this bed-room.

Branwell himself was very conscious of his failings at this time, and somewhat ashamed of them. He writes to Leyland during the January of 1848: 'I was *really* far enough from well when I saw you last week at Halifax; and, if you should happen to see Mrs. —— of ——, you would

greatly oblige me by telling her that I consider her conduct towards me as most kind and motherly, and that, if I did anything during temporary illness, to offend her, I deeply regret it, and beg her to take my regret as my apology till I see her again; which I trust will be ere long.' He continues, speaking in general terms of his literary work, and his poems, mentioning especially the poem of 'Caroline,' which he had written a long time before, and concludes by promising a longer letter later on.

There is prefixed to this letter a drawing, one of the strangest that Branwell ever made,—which he advises his friend to destroy,—a portrait of himself, head and shoulders, vigorously executed with the pen, and an admirable likeness too, in profile, grave and thoughtful, wearing his spectacles, but a portrait of Branwell in what a plight! For, just as the martyrs of old are represented with the knife planted in their breast, and the rope placed round their neck, so has Branwell pictured himself, with the halter about his throat, in the morbid martyrdom of his feverish imagination.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRANWELL'S LATER POETICAL WORKS.

Branwell's Poetical Work—Sketch of the Materials which he intended to use in the Poem of 'Morley Hall'—The Poem—The Subject left Incomplete—Branwell's Poem, 'The End of All'—His Letter to Leyland asking an Opinion on his Poem, 'Percy Hall'—Observations—The Poem.

BRANWELL'S poetical work in this period, when his health was failing, is incomplete, for there remain two pieces from his hand, both of which are fragments only. The first of these is 'Morley Hall,' which he was writing for his friend Leyland, but which he never lived to finish. He designed it to be an epic, in several cantos, dealing with a succession of romantic episodes, of which an elopement that actually took place, as I have previously had occasion to mention, was the chief feature. The part

he completed was the introductory canto, or rather a portion of it, which is given below; but, since this was a work into which he entered with much spirit, and which would have been a long and important one, had it been completed, it may not be amiss here to sketch briefly the materials with which he proposed to work.

Morley Hall, or all that remains of it, is situated in the parish of Leigh, in the county of Lancaster; and was the residence of two families in succession, which became allied by marriage, and attained some celebrity. The first family was that of Leyland, originally of the place of that name in Lancashire, and afterwards, for many generations preceding the reign of King Henry VIII., residing at Morley Hall.

In Henry VIII.'s time the mansion was owned by Sir William Leyland, or Leland, whose family consisted of Thomas, his son and heir, and his daughters Anne and Elizabeth, by his marriage with Anne, daughter and heiress of Allan Syngleton of Whitgill, in Craven, Esq. Living in great opulence at Morley, Sir William

was visited by the learned antiquary, his friend, and probably his relative, John Leland. This writer says of his visit: 'Cumming from Manchestre towards Morle, Syr William Lelande's howse, I passid by enclosid grounde, . . . leving on the left hand a mile and more of, a fair place of Mr. Langforde's caulled Agecroft . . . Morle, Mr. Lelande's Place, is buildid, saving the Fundation, of stone squarid that risith within a great Moote a vi foot above the water, al of tymbre, after the commune sort of building of Houses of the Gentilmen for most of Lancastreshire. Ther is as much Plesur of Orchardes, of great Varite of Frute and fair made Walkes and Gardines as ther is in any Place of Lancastreshire.'[1]

Sir William was succeeded by Thomas, his son, who had married Anne, daughter of Sir John Atherton, and had issue Robert, his son and heir,[2] and two daughters, Anne and Alice. Anne married Edward Tyldesley, of Tyldesley, with whom the legend, versified by Mr. Peters, and on which Branwell intended to write at

[1] Itinerary, vol. 5, p. 83.

[2] Inquisition *post mortem* of Thomas Leyland of the Morleys, co. Lanc., Esq. (Yorkshire lands) taken at Bradford, co. York, 11th Sept., 6 Eliz.

greater length, alleges that she eloped. The tradition of this event still lingers at Morley Hall. It is said that when the attachment sprang up between Anne, the eldest daughter of Thomas Leyland, and Edward Tyldesley, the connection was forbidden by the lady's father. It is further said that, regardless of this prohibition, a night was fixed upon for an elopement, and that, when the inmates of the house were buried in sleep, it was arranged she should tie a rope round her waist, the loose end of which she should throw across the moat to Tyldesley, who was to be in waiting, and, with another, should lower herself into the water, and be drawn to the land by him. The legend says this was successfully accomplished, and that the marriage was celebrated before the elopement was known to the family.[1]

It is remarkable that, while Thomas Leyland had a legitimate son and heir in Robert Leyland, the manor-house of Morley and its demesnes passed into the family of Tyldesley by marriage alone, as if there had been no such person.

[1] 'The White Rose of York,' 1834, pp. 226—229.

There are other stories relating to this family, of wild and weird interest, with which Branwell was acquainted; but this passing allusion is all that the scope of the present work will allow.

Of the family of Tyldesley of Morley was the brave Sir Thomas, a major-general in the royal army, who was slain at Wigan on the 25th of August, 1651. To this circumstance Branwell alludes in his poem. The fragment is as follows:—

MORLEY HALL,

LEIGH—LANCASHIRE.

'When Life's youth, overcast by gathering clouds
Of cares that come like funeral-following crowds,
Wearying of that which is, and cannot see
A sunbeam burst upon futurity,
It tries to cast away the woes that are
And borrow brighter joys from times afar.
For what our feet tread may have been a road
By horses' hoofs pressed 'neath a camel's load;
But what we ran across in childhood's hours
Were fields, presenting June with May-tide flowers:
So what was done and borne, if long ago,
Will satisfy our heart, though stained by tears of woe.

'When present sorrows every thought employ,
Our father's woes may take the garb of joy,

And, knowing what our sires have undergone,
Ourselves can smile, though weary, wandering on.
For if our youth a thunder-cloud o'ershadows,
Changing to barren swamps Life's flowering meadows,
We know that fiery flash and bursting peal
Others, like us, were forced to hear and feel;
And while they moulder in a quiet grave,
Robbed of all havings—worthless all they have—
We still, with face erect, behold the sun—
Have bright examples in what has been done
By head or hand—and, in the times to come,
May tread bright pathways to our gate of doom.

'So, if we gaze from our snug villa's door,
By vines or honeysuckles covered o'er,
Though we have saddening thoughts, we still can smile
In thinking our hut supersedes the pile
Whose turrets totter 'mid the woods before us,
And whose proud owners used to trample o'er us;
All now by weeds and ivy overgrown,
And touched by Time, that hurls down stone from stone.
We gaze with scorn on what is worn away,
And never dream about our own decay.
Thus, while this May-day cheers each flower and tree,
Enlivening earth and almost cheering me,
I half forget the mouldering moats of Leigh.

'Wide Lancashire has changed its babyhood,
As Time makes saplings spring to timber wood;
But as grown men their childhood still remember,
And think of Summer in their dark December,

So Manchester and Liverpool may wonder,
And bow to old halls over which they ponder,
Unknowing that man's spirit yearns to all
Which—once lost—prayers can never more recall.
The storied piles of mortar, brick, and stone,
Where trade bids noise and gain to struggle on,
Competing for the prize that Mammon gives—
Youth killed by toil and profits bought with lives—
Will not prevent the quiet, thinking mind
From looking back to years when Summer wind
Sang, not o'er mills, but round ancestral halls,
And, 'stead of engine's steam, gave dews from waterfalls.

'He who by brick-built houses closely pent,
That show nought beautiful to sight or scent,
Pines for green fields, will cherish in his room
Some pining plant bereft of natural bloom;
And, like the crowds which yonder factories hold,
Withering 'mid warmth, and in their spring-tide old,
So Lancashire may fondly look upon
Her wrecks fast vanishing of ages gone,
And while encroaching railroad, street, and mill
On every side the smoky prospect fill,
She yet may smile to see some tottering wall
Bring old times back, like ancient Morley Hall.
But towers that Leland saw in times of yore
Are now, like Leland's works, almost no more—
The antiquarian's pages, cobweb-bound,
The antique mansion, levelled with the ground.

'When all is gone that once gave food to pride,
Man little cares for what Time leaves beside;

And when an orchard and a moat, half dry,
Remain, sole relics of a power passed by,
Should we not think of what ourselves shall be,
And view our coffins in the stones of Leigh.
For what within yon space was once the abode
Of peace or war to man, and fear of God,
Is now the daily sport of shower or wind,
And no acquaintance holds with human kind.
Some who can be loved, and love can give,
While brain thinks, pulses beat, and bodies live,
Must, in death's helplessness, lie down with those
Who find, like us, the grave their last repose,
When Death draws down the veil and Night bids
Evening close.

'King Charles, who, fortune falling, would not fall,
Might glance with saddened eyes on Morley Hall,
And, while his throne escaped misfortune's wave,
Remember Tyldesley died that throne to save.'

. . . . . .

Branwell's next poem of this period is entitled the 'End of All,' which is complete, and is one of the most pathetic he ever wrote. It constitutes a true picture of his mood, and illustrates, at this time, the sombre and troubled nature of his thoughts. He pourtrays, in shades of great depth, his reflections on the death of one dear to him, whose loss leaves his soul a blank and desolate void, an evil which nothing can alle-

viate or remove. But he dreams for a moment that a life of peril in far-off lands, and in battle, strife, and danger, that the 'stony joys' of solitary ambition, may shrine the memory of sorrows which cannot be destroyed. Yet, even from this cold dream, this cruel opiate of the heart, he is recalled by the groans of her who is dying, to the consciousness that, with her departure, all will go. The bereaved is Branwell himself, and his 'Mary' is doubtless the lady of his misplaced affection, over whose loss he still broods in melancholy and afflicted language, each pathetic chord vibrating with intense mental anguish, as he contemplates the future years of desolation in which he is left to wander tombward unaided and alone. Here, as in his other poems, the rhythmic sweetness of Branwell's verse flows on in words well chosen to express the idea he intends to convey, which itself is worked out with great suggestiveness of power.

THE END OF ALL.

'In that unpitying Winter's night,
When my own wife—my Mary—died,
I, by my fire's declining light,
Sat comfortless, and silent sighed,

While burst unchecked grief's bitter tide,
As I, methought, when she was gone,
Not hours, but years, like this must bide,
And wake, and weep, and watch alone.

'All earthly hope had passed away,
And each clock-stroke brought Death more nigh
To the still-chamber where she lay,
With soul and body calmed to die;
But *mine* was not her heavenward eye
When hot tears scorched me, as her doom
Made my sick heart throb heavily
To give impatient anguish room.

'"Oh now," methought, "a little while,
And this great house will hold no more
Her whose fond love the gloom could while
Of many a long night gone before!"
Oh! all those happy hours were o'er
When, seated by our own fireside,
I'd smile to hear the wild winds roar,
And turn to clasp my beauteous bride.

'I could not bear the thoughts which rose
Of what *had* been, and what *must* be,
And still the dark night would disclose
Its sorrow-pictured prophecy;
Still saw I—miserable me—
Long, long nights else, in lonely gloom,
With time-bleached locks and trembling knee—
Walk aidless, hopeless, to my tomb.

'Still, still that tomb's eternal shade
Oppressed my heart with sickening fear,
When I could see its shadow spread
Over each dreary future year,
Whose vale of tears woke such despair
That, with the sweat-drops on my brow,
I wildly raised my hands in prayer
That Death would come and take me now;

'Then stopped to hear an answer given—
So much had madness warped my mind—
When, sudden, through the midnight heaven,
With long howl woke the Winter's wind;
And roused in me, though undefined,
A rushing thought of tumbling seas
Whose wild waves wandered unconfined,
And, far-off, surging, whispered, "Peace."

'I cannot speak the feeling strange,
Which showed that vast December sea,
Nor tell whence came that sudden change
From aidless, hopeless misery;
But somehow it revealed to me
A life—when things I loved were gone—
Whose solitary liberty
Might suit me wandering tombward on.

''Twas not that I forgot my love—
That night departing evermore—
'Twas hopeless grief for her that drove
My soul from all it prized before;
That misery called me to explore

A new-born life, whose stony joy
Might calm the pangs of sorrow o'er,
Might *shrine* their memory, not destroy.

'I rose, and drew the curtains back
To gaze upon the starless waste,
And image on that midnight wrack
The path on which I longed to haste,
From storm to storm continual cast,
And not one moment given to view;
O'er mind's wild winds the memories passed
Of hearts I loved—of scenes I knew.

'My mind anticipated all
The things my eyes have seen since then;
I heard the trumpet's battle-call,
I rode o'er ranks of bleeding men,
I swept the waves of Norway's main,
I tracked the sands of Syria's shore,
I felt that such strange strife and pain
Might me from living death restore.

'Ambition I would make my bride,
And joy to see her robed in red,
For none through blood so wildly ride
As those whose hearts before have bled;
Yes, even though *thou* should'st long have laid
Pressed coldly down by churchyard clay,
And though I knew thee thus decayed,
I *might* smile grimly when away;

'Might give an opiate to my breast,
Might dream:—but oh! that heart-wrung groan

Forced from me with the thought confessed
That all would go if *she* were gone;
I turned, and wept, and wandered on
All restlessly—from room to room—
To that still chamber, where alone
A sick-light glimmered through the gloom.

'The all-unnoticed time flew o'er me,
While my breast bent above her bed,
And that drear life which loomed before me
Choked up my voice—bowed down my head.
Sweet holy words to me she said,
Of that bright heaven which shone so near,
And oft and fervently she prayed
That I might some time meet her there;

'But, soon enough, all words were over,
When this world passed, and Paradise,
Through deadly darkness, seemed to hover
O'er her half-dull, half-brightening eyes;
One last dear glance she gives her lover,
One last embrace before she dies;
And then, while he seems bowed above her,
His *Mary* sees him from the skies.'

Another poem of Branwell's of this date, the last he ever wrote, is entitled 'Percy Hall,' which he did not live to complete. The first draft was sent for Leyland's opinion, with the following letter:

'Haworth, Bradford,
'Yorks.

'MY DEAR SIR,

'I enclose the accompanying fragment, which is so soiled that I would have transcribed it, if I had had the heart to exert myself, only in order to get from you an opinion as to whether, when finished, it would be worth sending to some respectable periodical, like "Blackwood's Magazine."

'I trust you got safely home from rough Haworth, and am,

'Dear Sir,

'Your most sincerely,

'P. B. BRONTË.'

At the foot of the page on which the letter is written, is drawn, in pen-and-ink, a low, massive, stone cross, inscribed with the word, 'POBRE!' standing on the top of a bleak hill, with a wild sky behind; and Branwell says of it below: 'The best epitaph ever written. It is carved on a rude cross in Spain, over a murdered traveller, and simply means "Poor fellow!"' It will be remembered, in connec-

tion with this idea of Branwell's, that Lord Byron, in one of his letters, describes the impression produced upon him by seeing the inscription, 'Implora pace!' upon a tomb at Bologna. The poet says: 'When I die, I should wish that some friend would see these words, and no other, placed above my grave—"Implora pace!"' The perusal of this remark induced Mrs. Hemans to write her pathetic little poem which has the Italian epitaph for its title.

This letter of Branwell's is particularly interesting, because it shows us that, even in the last year of his life, and when dealing with the last uncompleted poem he ever wrote, he preserved the ambition of appearing in the literary world as a poet; and because he again speaks of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' whose value, it will be remembered, had impressed itself upon the youthful minds of himself and his sisters.

The fragment, 'Percy Hall,' which was enclosed with the letter to Leyland, though still morbid, is one of the most exquisite its author wrote. Here, by a strange and beautiful coincidence—if coincidence it be—we find Bran-

well, in his latest work, as in his youthful ones, given in the earlier part of this work, occupied with the dread study of a consumptive decline; we find him, in short, tinctured with the shadows of his later career, telling again of the death of that sister, whose memory he cherished with a life-long affection; and perhaps, too, with a deeper insight than the other members of his family possessed, he foretells the end that awaited his sisters Emily and Anne, from that disease, whose poison was working in his own slender frame. The treatment of the subject, indeed, is truly characteristic of Branwell's feelings at the time, and of his impressions engendered by the mournful malady with which his family was afflicted. This poem, like some of those already noticed in the former pages of the present work, is distinguished by images, scenes, and conceptions, almost invariably animated by the instinctive power and originality of genius. His descriptions of the condition of the lady, of the way in which weakness has schooled her to regard the future —the natural expression doubtless of Branwell at the time—of the influences that 'forbade her

heart to throb, her spirit to despond,' and of the agonized feelings of the survivor, are all instinct with the living breath of reality; they have the sublime dignity of truth, springing, as they do, from a knowledge far too intimate with the sorrows which inspired the poem. Perhaps, in the gaiety of the affectionate Percy, Branwell depicts, in some sort, his own disposition, though it has never been charged against him that he was beguiled by 'syren smiles,' or seduced by the delights of 'play.' It seems to me that Branwell's poetical genius is as much higher than that of his sister Emily as hers was superior to the talents of Charlotte and Anne, in their versified productions. Beautiful, wild, and touching, like strains from the harp of Æolus, as are the emanations of Emily's poetical inspiration, they lack the force, depth, and breadth of Branwell's more expansive power of imagination, as displayed in his best productions; though even Branwell's poetical remains contain rather the evidence of power than the full expression of it.

PERCY HALL.

The westering sunbeams smiled on Percy Hall,
And green leaves glittered o'er the ancient wall
Where Mary sat, to feel the summer breeze,
And hear its music mingling 'mid the trees.
There she had rested in her quiet bower
Through June's long afternoon, while hour on hour
Stole, sweetly shining past her, till the shades,
Scarce noticed, lengthened o'er the grassy glades;
But yet she sat, as if she knew not how
Her time wore on, with Heaven-directed brow,
And eyes that only seemed awake, whene'er
Her face was fanned by summer evening's air.
All day her limbs a weariness would feel,
As if a slumber o'er her frame would steal;
Nor could she wake her drowsy thoughts to care
For day, or hour, or what she was, or where:
Thus—lost in dreams, although debarred from sleep,
While through her limbs a feverish heat would creep,
A weariness, a listlessness, that hung
About her vigour, and Life's powers unstrung—
She did not feel the iron gripe of pain,
But *thought* felt irksome to her heated brain;
Sometimes the stately woods would float before her,
Commingled with the cloud-piles brightening o'er her,
Then change to scenes for ever lost to view,
Or mock with phantoms which she never knew:
Sometimes her soul seemed brooding on to-day,
And then it wildly wandered far away,

Snatching short glimpses of her infancy,
Or lost in day-dreams of what yet might be.

'Yes—through the labyrinth-like course of thought—
Whate'er might be remembered or forgot,
Howe'er diseased the dream might be, or dim,
Still seemed the *Future* through each change to swim,
All indefinable, but pointing on
To what should welcome her when Life was gone;
She felt as if—to all she knew so well—
Its voice was whispering her to say "farewell;"
Was bidding her forget her happy home;
Was farther fleeting still—still beckoning her to come.

'She felt as one might feel who, laid at rest,
With cold hands folded on a panting breast,
Has just received a husband's last embrace,
Has kissed a child, and turned a pallid face
From this world—with its feelings all laid by—
To one unknown, yet hovering—oh! how nigh!

'And yet—unlike that image of decay—
There hovered round her, as she silent lay,
A holy sunlight, an angelic bloom,
That brightened up the terrors of the tomb,
And, as it showed Heaven's glorious world beyond,
Forbade her heart to throb, her spirit to despond.

'But, who steps forward, o'er the glowing green,
With silent tread, these stately groves between?
To watch his fragile flower, who sees him not,
Yet keeps his image blended with each thought,
Since but for *him* stole down that single tear

From her blue eyes, to think how very near
Their farewell hour might be!

'With silent tread
Percy bent o'er his wife his golden head;
And, while he smiled to see how calm she slept,
A gentle feeling o'er his spirit crept,
Which made him turn toward the shining sky
With heart expanding to its majesty,
While he bethought him how more blest *its* glow
Than *that* he left one single hour ago,
Where proud rooms, heated by a feverish light,
Forced vice and villainy upon his sight;
Where snared himself, or snaring into crime,
His soul had drowned its hour, and lost its count of time.

'The syren-sighs and smiles were banished now,
The cares of "play" had vanished from his brow;
He took his Mary's hot hand in his own,
She raised her eyes, and—oh, how soft they shone!
Kindling to fondness through their mist of tears,
Wakening afresh the light of fading years!—
He knew not why she turned those shining eyes
With such a mute submission to the skies;
He knew not why her arm embraced him so,
As if she *must* depart, yet *could not* let him go!

'With death-like voice, but angel-smile, she said,
"My love, they need not care, when I am dead,
To deck with flowers my capped and coffined head;

For all the flowers which I should love to see
Are blooming now, and will have died with me:
The same sun bids us all revive to-day,
And the same winds will bid us to decay;
When Winter comes we all shall be no more—
Departed into dust—next, covered o'er
By Spring's reviving green. See, Percy, now
How red my cheek—how red my roses blow!
But come again when blasts of Autumn come;
Then mark their changing leaves, their blighted bloom;
Then come to my bedside, then look at *me*,
How changed in all—*except my love for thee!*"

'She spoke, and laid her hot hand on his own;
But he nought answered, save a heart-wrung groan;
For oh! too sure, her voice prophetic sounded
Too clear the proofs that in her face abounded
Of swift Consumption's power! Although each day
He'd seen her airy lightness fail away,
And gleams unnatural glisten in her eye;
He had not dared to dream that she could die,
But only fancied his a causeless fear
Of losing something which he held so dear;
Yet—now—when, startled at her prophet-cries,
To hers he turned his stricken, stone-like eyes,
And o'er her cheek declined his blighted head.
He saw Death write on it the *fatal red*—
He saw, and straightway sank his spirit's light
Into the sunless twilight of the starless night!

'While he sat, shaken by his sudden shock,
Again—and with an earnestness—she spoke,

As if the world of her Creator shone
Through all the cloudy shadows of her own :
" Come grieve not—darling—o'er my early doom ;
'Tis well that Death no drearier shape assume
Than this he comes in—well that widowed age
Will not extend my friendless pilgrimage
Through Life's dim vale of tears—'tis well that Pain
Wields not its lash nor binds its burning chain,
But leaves my death-bed to a mild decline,
Soothed and supported by a love like thine!" '

My copy of the poem is illustrated with a portrait, by J. B. Leyland, in pen-and-ink, of the ideal Percy. The drawing is bold and effective; and, though not intended for an exact portrait of Branwell, bears some resemblance to him in general character. The sketch is signed, 'Northangerland,' at the top; and, at the bottom, 'Alexander Percy, Esq.;' while the artist's name is discerned among the shadows which fall from the figure of Percy.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAME AT HAWORTH.

Charlotte Corresponds on Literary Subjects—Novels.—Confession of Authorship—Branwell's Failing Health—He Writes to Leyland—Branwell and Mr. George Searle Phillips—Branwell's Intellect Retains its Power—His Description of 'Professor Leonidas Lyon'—The latter Gentleman's Account of his Reading of 'Jane Eyre'—Branwell's Remarks on Charlotte and the Work.

THE early months of the year 1848 proved a severe trial for the Brontë family, as they did to the whole of the Haworth villagers. Influenza and other ailments were prevalent, and the sisters did not escape the former: Anne, indeed, suffered from a severe cough, with some fever, and her friends became alarmed. The position of the parsonage in relation to the churchyard rendered it unhealthy; but, at the instance of Mr. Brontë, a new grave-yard was opened in another place.

He did not, however, succeed in his attempt to get a good supply of water laid on to each house.

Charlotte, at the time, was still in correspondence with Mr. Lewes and Mr. Williams, about the review of 'Jane Eyre' in 'Fraser's Magazine,' and about other literary subjects. She was still keeping the secret of the authorship of her book from her friends, putting off 'E.' with evasive letters, and wishing her to 'laugh or scold A—— out of the publishing notion.' 'Wuthering Heights' had not been received by the public with much favour, and we do not hear of any further literary work by Emily. But Charlotte was writing 'Shirley,' and Anne was going on with 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' despite a consumptive listlessness that was upon her, such as Branwell describes in the wife of 'Percy;' and, in her letter written in January, Anne told 'E.' that they had done nothing 'to speak of' since she was at Haworth; yet they contrived to be busy from morning till night. In the spring, however, when this friend visited the Brontës again, full confession of authorship was made, and the poems and novels were shown to her.

The identity of Mr. Brontë's daughters with the 'Messrs. Bell,' had, however, been known to some, in connection with the poems, at an earlier date, and was occasionally spoken of, though the fact was not made public. Branwell himself was at home, quieter, but still failing in health and strength, for the constitutional taint, aided by his low spirits, and a bronchitis which had become chronic, was telling upon him.

'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' was submitted to the publisher of 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey,' and accepted by him in the June of this year. If the first works of Ellis and Acton Bell were undervalued because they were believed to be the earlier productions of the author of 'Jane Eyre,' Acton's new volume derived enhanced importance from being thought to be a production of the same hand. 'Jane Eyre' had had a great run in America, and a publisher there had offered Messrs. Smith and Elder a high price for early sheets of the next work of its author, which they accepted. But the publishers of 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' believing that Acton Bell was but a second name assumed by Currer Bell, made a similar offer to

another American house. This circumstance led to questions and explanations; and Charlotte and Anne determined to visit London, in order to assure Messrs. Smith and Elder that they were indeed distinct persons. The publishers were very much astonished to see the two delicate ladies, and they made them very welcome. Charlotte and Anne went to the Opera, they went to the Royal Academy and the National Gallery, and they visited Mr. Smith and Mr. Williams before returning to Haworth.

They found Branwell at home, physically the same as when they left him, gradually failing from the chronic bronchitis which had lasted through the summer, and with the perceptible wasting away of decline. Writing to his friend Leyland on July 22nd, he speaks of 'five months of utter sleeplessness, violent cough, and frightful agony of mind.' 'Long have I resolved,' he continues, 'to write to you a letter of five or six pages, but intolerable mental wretchedness and corporeal weakness have utterly prevented me.' The letter is signed, 'Yours sincerely, but nearly worn out, P. B. Brontë.' Charlotte attributed his illness to indulgence solely, and she had no

suspicion that the end was but two months away. She writes on July 28th: 'Branwell is the same in conduct as ever. His constitution seems much shattered. Papa, and sometimes all of us, have sad nights with him. He sleeps most of the day, and consequently will lie awake at night. But has not every house its trial?'[1] But Branwell's condition of health was not such as to keep him within doors, and there were revivals, as in Anne's case also, which permitted him to visit his friends. I spoke to him once in Halifax at the time, and he was often seen in the village of Haworth.

An interesting episode occurred in August or September, for an account of which we are indebted to Mr. George Searle Phillips.[2] We learn from it that, in the midst of physical decay and mental distress, Branwell's intellect retained its power to the last; and we learn also what pride he took in the works of his sisters, and in the reputation they had made. I can myself, from personal knowledge, endorse

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xvi.

[2] 'Branwell Brontë.' *The Mirror, a reflex of the World's Literature*, 1872.

all that Mr. Phillips says as to Branwell's brilliancy of intellect at this time. When Charlotte and Anne went to London, they had assumed the name of Brown; but their real name and the place of their residence were communicated to some people, and it was not long before it became quietly known. Then began the stream of pilgrims to the shrine of genius at Haworth, which has continued from that day to this, and will for many more. One gentleman, indeed, at the time, stayed three days at Haworth, maintaining a close intimacy with Branwell, and we know, from Mr. Phillips' narrative, in what light Branwell looked upon the first-comers.

'Branwell,' says his friend, 'during the latter part of my acquaintance with him, was much altered for the worse, in his personal appearance; but if he had altered in the same direction mentally, as his biographer says he had, then he must have been a man of immense and brilliant intellect. For I have rarely heard more eloquent and thoughtful discourse, flashing so brightly with random jewels of wit, and made more sunny and musical with poetry, than that

which flowed from his lips during the evenings I passed with him at the "Black Bull," in the village of Haworth. His figure was very slight, and he had, like his sister Charlotte, a superb forehead. But, even when pretty deep in his cups, he had not the slightest appearance of the sot that Mrs. Gaskell says he was. "His great tawny mane"—meaning thereby the hair of his head—was, it is true, somewhat dishevelled; but, apart from this, he gave no sign of intoxication. His eye was as bright, and his features were as animated, as they very well could be; and, moreover, his whole manner gave indications of intense enjoyment.'

Branwell described some of the characters in the novels, and talked much about his sisters, and especially about Charlotte, whose celebrity, he said, had already attracted more strangers to the village than had been known before; and Mr. Phillips gives the following account of the visit of one gentleman, an enthusiastic admirer of 'Jane Eyre,' whose somewhat eccentric personality he has veiled under the style and title of 'Leonidas Lyon, Professor of Greek in the London University':—

'One evening, as we sat together in the little parlour of the Inn, the landlord entered, and asked Branwell if he would see a gentleman who wanted to make his acquaintance.

'"He's a funny fellow," said the landlord; "and is somebody, I dare swear, with lots of money."

'As the landlord spoke, a squat little dapper fellow, with a white fur hat on his head, an umbrella under his arm, and a pair of blue spectacles on his nose, strutted into the room *sans cérémonie*. He approached the table in a very fussy and excited manner, exclaiming:

'"Landlord, bring us some brandy. I must have the pleasure of drinking a glass with the brother of that distinguished lady, who wrote the great book that made London blaze. Three glasses,—landlord—do you hear? And you, sir, are the great lady's brother, I presume? Professor Leonidas Lyon, sir, has the honour of introducing himself to your distinguished notice."

'Branwell responded, gravely:

'"Patrick Branwell Brontë, sir, has the honour

of welcoming you to Haworth, and begging you to be seated."

'Whereupon the little man bowed and scraped, and laughed a good-humoured laugh all over his good, round face, and said it was an honour he could not have hoped for, to sit as a guest at the same board, as he might say, "with the brother, the very flesh and blood, of the great lady who wrote the book."

'Here the brandy and water came in, and the little man grew merrier still, and more communicative. He was a Professor of Greek at the London University, and, chancing to be at Smith's, the London publisher's, whose friend Williams was a "wonderful man of letters—a very wonderful man indeed!"—Williams asked the Professor if he had seen the book of the season—"the immense book," he called it—which was going to make one good reputation, and half a dozen fortunes. Mr. Williams praised it so highly that he (the Professor) grew wild about it, and asked where it could be got. Upon this, he threw a sovereign to pay for it, and ran home without his change, to read it. "It was prodigious, sir," he exclaimed.'

The Professor went on in high praise of 'Jane Eyre,' and told Branwell and Mr. Phillips that his bed-time was ten o'clock, but that, when reading the book, he had sat on, completely absorbed, until six o'clock in the morning, when the housemaid came. Then he had retired to his own room, but, instead of going to bed, had sat on the edge of it, until he finished the story at ten A.M. Branwell said this history of a Professor's reading of 'Jane Eyre' made him laugh 'as if he would split his sides.' And when he told Charlotte about it the next day, she laughed heartily, too, as did the other sisters, when she went up stairs to tell them, and their laughter moved Branwell to renewed merriment.

'When the Professor's story was ended,' continues Mr. Phillips, 'he tried to cajole Branwell into introducing him to the "great lady" who wrote the book. He was dying to see her, he said, and had come all the way down into Yorkshire, from London, in the fond hope of getting a glimpse of her, and perhaps of touching the hem of her garment. When he found that Branwell fought shy of the proposition he actual-

ly offered him a large sum of money, and then, taking from his fob a valuable gold watch, laid it on the table, and said he would throw that in to boot, if he would only let him see her and shake hands with her . . . . .

'Poor Branwell spoke of his sister in most affectionate terms, such as none but a man of deep feeling could utter. He knew her power, and what tremendous depths of passion and pathos lay hid in her great surging heart, long before she gave expression to them in "Jane Eyre." When she wrote the first chapters of her Richardsonian novel, he condemned the work as in opposition to her genius—which is good proof of his discrimination and critical judgment. But when "The Professor" was written, he said that was better, but that she could do better still; and, although it is not equal to "Jane Eyre," yet it is a work of great originality and dramatic interest.

'"I know," said Branwell, after speaking of Charlotte's talents, "that I also had stuff enough in me to make popular stories; but the failure of the Academy plan ruined me. I was felled, like a tree in the forest, by a sudden and strong

wind, to rise no more. Fancy me, with my education, and those early dreams, which had almost ripened into realities, turning counter-jumper, or a clerk in a railway-office, which last was, you know, my occupation for some time. It simply degraded me in my own eyes, and broke my heart."

'It was useless,' says Mr. Phillips, 'to remonstrate with him, and yet I could not help it, and did my best to rouse the sleeping energies within him to noble action once more.

'"It is too late," he said; "and you would say so, too, if you knew all." He used to be the oracle of the secluded household in earlier days —before the love of drink mastered him. His opinion was invariably sought for upon the literary performances of his sisters; but at the time I am now speaking of, he was a cipher in the house.'

Such is the account given by Mr. Phillips of his friend; so different in its character from that which Mr. Grundy, and, following him, Miss Robinson, offer, in the incredible episode of the carving-knife and the slaying of the devil, un-

less we believe the incident—which that gentleman states to have taken place at this period, how erroneously we have seen—to have been acted, as is most probable, in grotesque humour.

During the last two months of his life, Branwell became the object of much interest and received some homage; for, his sisters living secluded lives, he was generally the only member of the family accessible to the public. When he met with strangers, he invariably comported himself with becoming dignity, and did not lay himself open to the effects of their curiosity. Those who made his acquaintance were impressed, as Mr. Phillips was, with his great mental calibre, and with the grace and wit of his conversation. One gentleman—himself at the present time in the first place in one of the professions—who knew Branwell intimately, declares to me that he always believed the abilities of Charlotte's brother were such as might have placed him in the very front rank of literature.

CHAPTER XV.

DEATH OF BRANWELL.

Branwell's failing Health—Chronic Bronchitis and Marasmus—His Death—Charlotte's allusions to it—Correction of some Statements relating to it—Summary of the subsequent History of the Brontë Family.

THE spring and summer of the year 1848 were wild, wet, and unfavourable, and the fine weather in August was of little benefit to Branwell. His appetite was diminished, and he was weaker. He was suffering, in addition to his chronic bronchitis, from marasmus, a consumptive wasting away, arising from hereditary tendency, as well as from mental agony and the effects of irregular life. However, neither himself nor his family, nor his medical attendants had any anticipation of immediate danger.

He was not, indeed, altogether confined to the house, and he was in the village only two days before his death; but, on that occasion, his strength failed before he reached his home. William Brown, the sexton's brother, found him in the lane which leads up to the parsonage, quite exhausted, panting for breath, and unable to proceed. He was helped to the house, which he never again left alive.

In the last few days of his life, Branwell was more reconciled, more subdued, and better feelings filled his mind. The affection of his family returned undiminished, and they watched with intense anxiety the end of their cherished brother. The strange madness that had clouded his mind for so many months, left him now, and the simple thoughts and feelings of his early years came back to him again. He died on the morning of Sunday, September the 24th. He had talked through the night of his misspent life, his wasted youth, and his shame, with compunction. He was also filled with the

'Sense of past youth and manhood come in vain,
Of genius given, and knowledge won in vain.'

His natural love likewise came out in beautiful and touching words, that consoled and satisfied those he was about to leave for ever.

Some time before the end, John Brown entered Branwell's room, and they were alone. The young man, though faint and dying, spoke of the life they had led together. He took a short retrospect of his past excesses, in which the grave-digger had often partaken; but in it he made no mention of the lady whose image had distracted his brain. He appeared, in the calmness of approaching death, and the self-possession that preceded it, to be unconscious that he had ever loved any but the members of his family, for the depth and tenderness of which affection he could find no language to express. But, presently, seizing Brown's hand, he uttered the words: 'Oh, John, I am dying!' then, turning, as if within himself, he murmured: 'In all my past life I have done nothing either great or good.' Conscious that the last moment was near, the sexton summoned the household; and retreated to the belfry. It was about nine in the morning when the agony began. Bran-

well's struggles and convulsions were great, and continued for some time: in the last gasp, he started convulsively, almost to his feet, and fell dead into his father's arms.

Mrs. Gaskell says, of this event: 'I have heard, from one who attended Branwell in his last illness, that he resolved on standing up to die. He had repeatedly said, that as long as there was life, there was strength of will to do what it chose; and, when the last agony began, he insisted on assuming the position just mentioned.' This account does not accord with that given to me by the Browns, and, perhaps, it arose from some exaggeration of what actually took place.

On October the 9th, Charlotte writes thus of her brother's end: 'The past three weeks have been a dark interval in our humble home. Branwell's constitution has been failing fast all the summer; but still neither the doctors nor himself thought him so near his end as he was. He was entirely confined to his bed but for one single day, and was in the village two days before his death. He died, after twenty minutes' struggle, on Sunday morning, Sep-

tember 24th. He was perfectly conscious till the last agony came on. His mind had undergone the peculiar change which frequently precedes death, two days previously; the calm of better feelings filled it; a return of natural affection marked his last moments. He is in God's hands now; and the All-Powerful is likewise the All-Merciful. A deep conviction that he rests at last—rests well after his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life—fills and quiets my mind now. The final separation, the spectacle of his pale corpse, gave me more acute, bitter pain than I could have imagined. Till the last hour comes, we never know how much we can forgive, pity, regret a near relative. All his vices were and are nothing now. We remember only his woes. Papa was acutely distressed at first, but, on the whole, has borne the event well.'[1]

A few days later she wrote to another friend, speaking of her brother's death. 'The event to which you allude came upon us indeed with startling suddenness, and was a severe shock to us all . . . . . I thank you for your kind

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xvi.

sympathy. Many, under the circumstances, would think our loss rather a relief than otherwise; in truth, we must acknowledge, in all humility and gratitude, that God has greatly tempered judgment with mercy; but, yet, as you doubtless know from experience, the last earthly separation cannot take place between near relations without the keenest pangs on the part of the survivors. Every wrong and sin is forgotten then; pity and grief share the hearts and the memory between them. Yet we are not without comfort in our affliction. A most propitious change marked the last few days of poor Branwell's life . . . . . and this change could not be owing to the fear of death, for within half-an-hour of his decease he seemed unconscious of danger.'

Charlotte concludes by referring to her own health, which had given way under the strain.[1]

Branwell was buried in the grave in which the remains of his sisters Maria and Elizabeth lay, and his name is placed next after theirs on

[1] 'Charlotte Brontë: a Monograph,' by T. Wemyss Reid, p. 90.

the tablet. Thus, after twenty-three years, he joined in the dust those from whom in life he had never been separated in affection.

It would have been well if, when the grave closed over his mortal remains, it had buried in oblivion the memory of his failings and his sorrows. Charlotte, as we have seen, when her brother was gone, remembered nothing but his woes; and, if the biographers of herself and her sister Emily had consulted the feelings of those on whom they wrote—which have been so touchingly and tearfully expressed by Charlotte—they would have drawn the veil over whatever offences Branwell, as mortal, might have committed. But, amongst Mrs. Gaskell's other statements regarding him, there is one, relating even to his death, which cannot be passed over in silence here, since, though she had been compelled to omit it, with her other charges, from the second edition of her work, Miss Robinson has reproduced it recently in her 'Emily Brontë.' The statement was to the effect that, when Branwell died, his pockets were filled with the letters of the lady whom he had ad-

mired.[1] To this bold statement Martha Brown gave to me a flat contradiction, declaring that she was employed in the sick-room at the time, and had personal knowledge that not one letter, nor a vestige of one, from the lady in question was so found. The letters were mostly from a gentleman of Branwell's acquaintance, then living near the place of his former employment. Martha was indignant at the misrepresentation.

It may not be amiss here, in the briefest possible way, to give an outline of the subsequent history of the Brontë family. Emily's health began rapidly to fail after Branwell's death, which was a great shock to her, and she never left the house alive after the Sunday succeeding it. Her cough was very obstinate, and she was troubled with shortness of breath. Charlotte saw the danger, but could do nothing to ward it off, for Emily was silent and reserved, gave no answers to questions, and took no remedies that were prescribed. She grew weaker daily, and the end came on Tuesday, December the 19th. At the same time Anne was slowly failing, but she lingered longer. 'Anne's decline,'

[1] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xvi. 1st Ed.

said Charlotte, 'is gradual and fluctuating; but its nature is not doubtful.' Unlike Emily, she looked for sympathy, took medicines, and did her best to get well. It was arranged at last that Charlotte and she should go to Scarborough, hoping the change of air might invigorate her, and they left the parsonage on May the 24th, 1849. But the change had no beneficial effect, and Anne died on May the 28th, at Scarborough, where she was buried.

After this the more purely literary portion of Charlotte's life commenced. She completed 'Shirley' early in September, 1849, and it was published on October the 26th. Her real name, and the neighbourhood in which she resided, became now generally known. The reviews showered rapidly; but Charlotte thought that one the best by Eugène Forçade, in the 'Revue des deux Mondes.' The cloud now passed away from her, and she visited London, made the acquaintance of Thackeray, Miss Martineau, and others, and entered eagerly into the occupations of literary life. 'Villette' was completed in November, 1852. Charlotte married the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, who had long been her father's curate,

on June the 29th, 1854, and she died on Saturday, March the 31st, 1855. The Rev. Patrick Brontë, whom I knew, a fine, tall, grey-haired, and venerable old man, survived all his children, and died at Haworth on January 7th, 1861.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRANWELL'S CHARACTER.

Branwell's Character in his Poetry—The Pious and Tender Tone of Mind which it Displays—Branwell's Tendency to Dwell on the Past rather than on the Future—Illustrated—The Sad Tone of his Mind—He is Inclined to be Morbid—The Way in which Branwell regarded Nature—Observations on the Character Displayed in his Works.

It has often been observed that the life of a poet may best be learned from the works he has left behind him. We may fall into error in dealing with the circumstances of his external life, and may make mistakes as to chronology or facts, and, in this way, may be led often to form a false estimate of his character; but, if we discover the personality concealed in his writings, if we can grasp the hidden spirit by which they are in-

formed, we shall be enabled to follow his heart in its cherished affections, to understand the characteristic tendency of his thoughts, and to comprehend even the very psychology of his soul. This enquiry, it is true, is often difficult in the extreme; one cannot always unravel the tangled mysteries in which natural expression is wrapped up, nor fully pierce the cloudy medium of conventionality or affectation through which it may be dimly revealed; it is especially difficult, also, to follow it in the works of a writer of a school like that of the Euphuists, or of Pope, where the medium is one of exaggerated refinement, or of classical and formal preciseness.

But, with the writings of Branwell Brontë, the case is entirely different; and for a very simple reason, viz., that everything he wrote proceeded from a personal inspiration, and was the direct expression of the fulness of emotion, and of vivid thoughts or feelings which could scarcely be hidden; because, in short, he wrote in the true artistic spirit of having something to say.

If Branwell's affectionate nature led him to dwell upon the memories of his earlier years,

and upon the thoughts of those dead sisters whom he had loved so much, he spoke in the voice of Harriet weeping for the departed Caroline; it needed but his remembrance of the fell disease that had deprived him of his sisters, and the fearful havoc which it was yet to work in his family, to inspire him with the sad fancy of his 'Percy Hall.' If he sank into the depths of morbid melancholy, and was filled with a consciousness of the worthlessness of ambition, the folly of pride, and the universality of sorrow, his sonnets were a natural expression, in which he found both relief and consolation.

In his case it requires no Pheidian hand to bring out the statue from the marble, but only a sympathetic spirit, a heart filled with the affections of humanity, and a mind attuned to thoughts somewhat sad, to enable one to enter into every mood in which Branwell wrote, and to understand the moral and tender pathos that fills his works. It is because Branwell's poems are so fully expressive of his feelings at the time when they were written that they are so separately placed in this work. But, before we conclude it, it will be well to sum up, in a

slight sketch, a few of the most characteristic features of his writings, and, in so doing, we shall arrive at a correct estimate of his disposition and of his poetry together.

The first thing, then, that strikes one in Branwell's verse, beginning at its youthful period, is the tone of piety that distinguishes it. The simple stanzas which he sent to Wordsworth, even, however worthless as poetry, are valuable, because they show us the early bent of his mind; and the beautiful lines which he wrote a year later, in 1838, where he first manifests that consciousness of the vanity of earthly things, which his sister Anne also versified, tell us of the hope of a heavenly future, which is contrasted, in its serenity, with the evils of mortal life. The poem entitled 'Caroline's Prayer,' and the one 'On Caroline' also, simple though they are, are evidence of a devotional turn of mind; and mark again, in the longer poem of 'Caroline,' how Harriet finds divine consolation in the calm of Nature:

'Quiet airs of sacred gladness
Breathing through these woodlands wild,
O'er the whirl of mortal madness
Spread the slumbers of a child;'

and how tenderly she remembers the pious lessons which her dead sister had drawn from the sufferings of the Saviour of man, a recollection, let it be remembered, which Branwell himself preserved. A little later, we find Branwell occupied upon a long poem, of which we possess only a fragment, wholly sacred in its character, and moral in its purpose,—'Noah's Warning over Methusaleh's Grave.' Here Noah, before the universal Deluge, in the presence even of the cloudy wall 'piled boding round the firmament,' harangues the people, bidding them withdraw from sin, ere it be too late. It is true, however, that in the later poems, when Branwell's mind is cast into its deepest gloom, this disposition is not so prominent, and, perhaps, can be gathered only from an abundance of tender touches, which could proceed from nothing but a devotional spirit; and thus we may infer that, though he might have lost some of his early piety, he never lost the effect of it. There is, besides, throughout Branwell's work, the evidence of a justly balanced morality, in that he nowhere exalts depraved passions, or manifests impiety, or, more than all, corrupts

his readers with the painting of sensuous ideas, or the description of sensuous incidents. And I would ask the reader, in connection with this admirable characteristic of his poetry, to remember that he has never been charged with indulgence of the kind that has lured away too many men of genius and mental power.

The next thing that strikes me in Branwell's poetry is the strong love that he manifests for the past, which he seems to value more than the present, and whose pleasures he deems sweeter and purer than any the future can have in store. This tone of thought could be very well understood if we had regard to circumstances of the later period of his life, when despair had cut off hope; but it is just as prominent in the earliest poems he wrote. It would seem that, to the pensive mind of Branwell, all the thoughts of childhood, all the joys of youth and its affections, became, as years passed on, hallowed and exalted in the golden halo of recollection. There were places in the sanctity of the past where the roses of Bendemeer grew, unchanging ever; places to which he turned for the joys of memory, when solitude inclined him

to reflection. These pleasures of memory were often of a pensive order, for they were connected with sorrowful events, or they were joys turned sorrowful, as joys will turn, when they have been long enough departed. In Branwell's letter to Wordsworth, and in his other letters, he expresses plenty of honest ambition, and talks bravely of work in the future; and he spoke in the same way also. But I have received from his poems the impression that this ambition grew from the requirements of circumstances, and from literary emulation; that, in fact, the constitution of Branwell's mind was of the gentle reflective nature to which the pleasures of ambition appear hollow and insufficient in themselves. At least it is clear that he dwelt with more satisfaction on the past than on the future. So far, indeed, as his poetry is concerned, we saw, in 'The End of All,' that it was only when loss made the past too painful for thought, that he turned to the stony joys of solitary ambition and personal fame. This seems to me to be a very tender trait in his character, however little it might fit him to fight the battle of life with those who looked for the

joys of the future, rather than turned to pleasures they could actually taste no more.

In Branwell's thoughtful moods, it required but the woodland sunshine, perhaps, or the sound of the distant bells, to bring back memories to him, as they brought back to Harriet, in the poem of 'Caroline,' many a scene of bygone days, opening the fount of tears, and waking memory to the thought

'Of visions sleeping—not forgot.'

Thus, under the pensive influence, there passed over her

'That swell of thought, which seems to fill
The bursting heart, the gushing eye,
While fades all *present* good or ill
Before the shades of things gone by.'

It called up in her, also, the hours when Caroline, too, listening to the wild storms of winter, had filled the nights with pictures and feelings

'From far-off memories brought.'

These treasures of memory, to which Branwell refers in many of his poems, were to him of a sacred nature, and might not be profaned.

He tells us, indeed, in one of his sonnets, that the tears of affection are dried up by the growth of honours, and by the interests and pursuits of life, which

> 'Dim or destroy those holy thoughts which cling
> Round where the forms we loved lie slumbering.'

For the past was thus hallowed by Branwell, because in it lay his earliest affections, and his most poignant sorrows. I have had occasion, in speaking of several of the poems in this volume, to point out the love which he shows for his dead sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, and how he mourned them up to the last year of his life. For his disposition was of a deeply affectionate order. He has, indeed, painted for us too vividly, in both the poems of 'Caroline' and 'Percy Hall,' the pangs of separation, and the cheerless void that remains when the loved one has departed, to leave us any doubt as to the sensitiveness of his nature.

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that Branwell's muse sings often morbidly enough, and that,—like some spirit that cannot forsake the scene of its mortal sorrows, and haunts the place of its affliction—he dwells

frequently upon details of a painful kind, that others would gladly have relegated to oblivion. In the poem of 'Caroline,' the picture of his mother, clad in black, is still before his eyes; he remembers even the grave-clothes of his sister in her coffin, and

> 'Her *too* bright cheek all faded now;'

the closing of the coffin lid, and the lowering of it into its narrow bed are yet before his eyes; and painfully he remembers his feeling at the grave-side:

> 'And wild my sob, when hollow rung
> The first cold clod above her flung.'

Later, though he was occupied with different subjects, Branwell could not entirely free himself from a morbid and painful analysis of the physical effects of the disease he dreaded so much; and very beautifully does he suggest the picture of consumptive decline and early decay.

This tone of thought, and the many misfortunes and gloomy forebodings that attended Branwell's later years, had a natural effect in giving a mournful cast to almost every emana-

tion of his muse; and we find, in effect, throughout the poems here collected, that, save in one instance—'The Epicurean's Song'—which we feel to be the production of a moment of elation, there is scarcely a line that does not breathe a consciousness of sad regret, or of cruel and bitter sorrow.

He was filled with the sense of the futility of human joy, and the abiding presence of woe:

> 'No! joy *itself* is but a shade,
> So well may its remembrance die,
> But cares, Life's conquerors, never fade,
> So strong is their reality.'

These sorrows, as years went by, grew so terrible in their crushing weight, that the mind could barely withstand them, and Branwell felt, in that period when his cry was for peace in death, that, when the light of life is gone,

> 'There come no sorrows crowding on,
> And powerless lies Despair.'

With Branwell, indeed, as with Mary in his poem of 'Percy Hall,' 'thought felt irksome to the heated brain.'

It was then that oblivion became to him a coveted relief from immediate woe, and that he envied the dreamless head of the wandering,

water-borne corpse, whose rolling bed seemed calmer than the turmoil of the world.

This figure of the body rocked by the waves of ocean, brings me to a consideration of the way in which Branwell regarded Nature, which had something very noteworthy in it. It was always remarked by his friends that the young poet was a great observer, and took an especial pleasure in the works of Nature. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising, at first sight, that, in his poems, he does not dwell upon them descriptively or in a marked manner, and that we have to infer, from certain suggestive touches and pictures—which do, indeed, speak more plainly than words could—that he observed them at all. But we learn that the works of Nature had for Branwell a deeper significance than for most people, that he conceived they had some mysterious sympathy or unspeakable connection with human affections, and were, in a manner, the expression or immediate reflection of the Deity. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge had already looked upon Nature somewhat in this wise; but it would be a mistake to suppose that Branwell imitated them: his thoughts flow

too swiftly and impetuously to admit of such a conclusion. It is possible that, if his life had passed calmly, he might have dwelt upon the simple beauties of Nature, and found in them a homely harmony with familiar ideas; Charlotte and Anne in their poetry scarcely get beyond this; but it was different with Emily and Branwell. Emily, with her reserved, passionate nature, had a sympathetic spell in the solitary moorland; and Branwell, labouring with his sorrows, found, in the wildest storms, a being with whom he must battle, or saw, in the mighty mountains, an image of unbroken strength and everlasting fortitude, such a power as he must strive after and make his own. But, in Branwell's earlier poems, this influence is not so marked, and his muse is simply attuned to the saddened thoughts in which Nature participates. Thus Wordsworth had sung:

> 'Fancy, who leads the pastimes of the glad,
> Full oft is pleased a wayward dart to throw;
> Sending sad shadows after things not sad,
> Peopling the harmless fields with signs of woe:
> Beneath her sway, a simple forest cry
> Becomes an echo of man's misery.'

And thus we see, in Branwell's 'Caroline,'

how, even in its calmness, the beautifully suggested picture of eve—when the sunlight slants, and the waters cease their motion, and the calm and hush tell of rest from labour—is made to harmonize with the plaintive thoughts of Harriet. But then comes the more significant question:

'Why is such a silence given
To this summer day's decay,
Does our earth feel aught of Heaven,
Can the voice of Nature pray?'

What, in short, is the harmonious and sympathetic spell that breathes through Nature?

The wild places of the earth, mountains and moorlands, where the storms raged, and the great winds blew, were nearest akin to the Titanic genius of Branwell and Emily. Thus, in the sonnet, the everlasting majesty of Black Comb was held up by Branwell as an example to man, and as a contrast to human feebleness; and later, when his woe was most acute, he was drawn into a 'communion of vague unity' with Penmaenmawr, comparing the living, beating heart of man with the stony hill, and begging,

'Let me, like it, arise o'er mortal care,
All woes sustain, yet never know despair,

Unshrinking face the griefs I now deplore,
And stand through storm and shine like moveless
Penmaenmawr.'

And, lastly, in the 'Epistle from a Father to a Child in her Grave,' we find him comparing himself with one in the midst of wild mountains:

'I, thy life's source, was like a wanderer breasting
Keen mountain winds, and on a summit resting,
Whose rough rocks rise above the grassy mead,
With sleet and north winds howling overhead.'

It will be seen from this short inquiry that the poetry of Branwell Brontë was entirely introspective, having, almost to the last line, some direct reference to his own thoughts or feelings; and that it may thus be read as an actual part of the story of his life. The disposition it reveals, though often hidden, as the readers of this book know, through the effects of folly and indulgence, was one of a singularly gentle, affectionate, and sympathetic character; passionate and unstable, it is true, but a disposition, nevertheless, that has been frequently misunderstood, and not seldom wronged. One of the aims of this book has been to set Patrick Branwell Brontë right with the public; an attempt, not to clear him from follies and weaknesses

that really were his—which the public, but for the mistakes of biographers, would never have known—but to show that, at any rate, his nature was one rather to be admired than condemned. It has aimed also, by the publication of his poetical writings, to demonstrate that his genius is not unworthy to be ranked with that which made his sisters famous. Yet it may, perhaps, be held that the poems here published contain more of rich promise than of real fulfilment, rather the earnest of literary success than the actual accomplishment of it. But, in reading the poetry of Branwell Brontë, which is so uniformly sad, it may be well to remember what Mr. Swinburne has said, in speaking of Mr. Browning, that 'to do justice to any book which deserves any other sort of justice than that of the fire or waste-paper basket, it is necessary to read it in a fit frame of mind.'

THE END.

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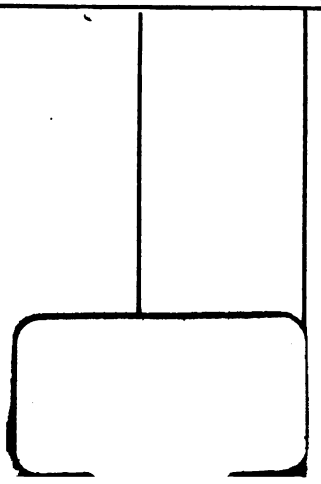

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